半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 6

LIFE'S GREATEST DIFFICULTY

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,
Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

®
DARK HORSE MANGA™

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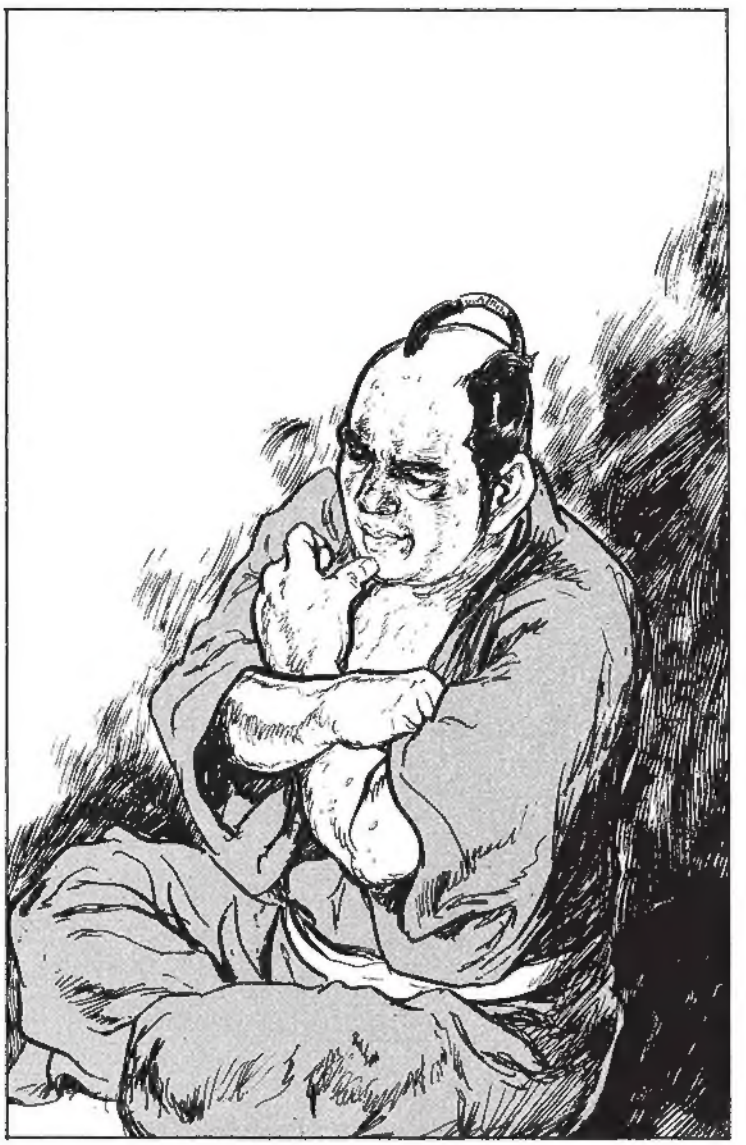
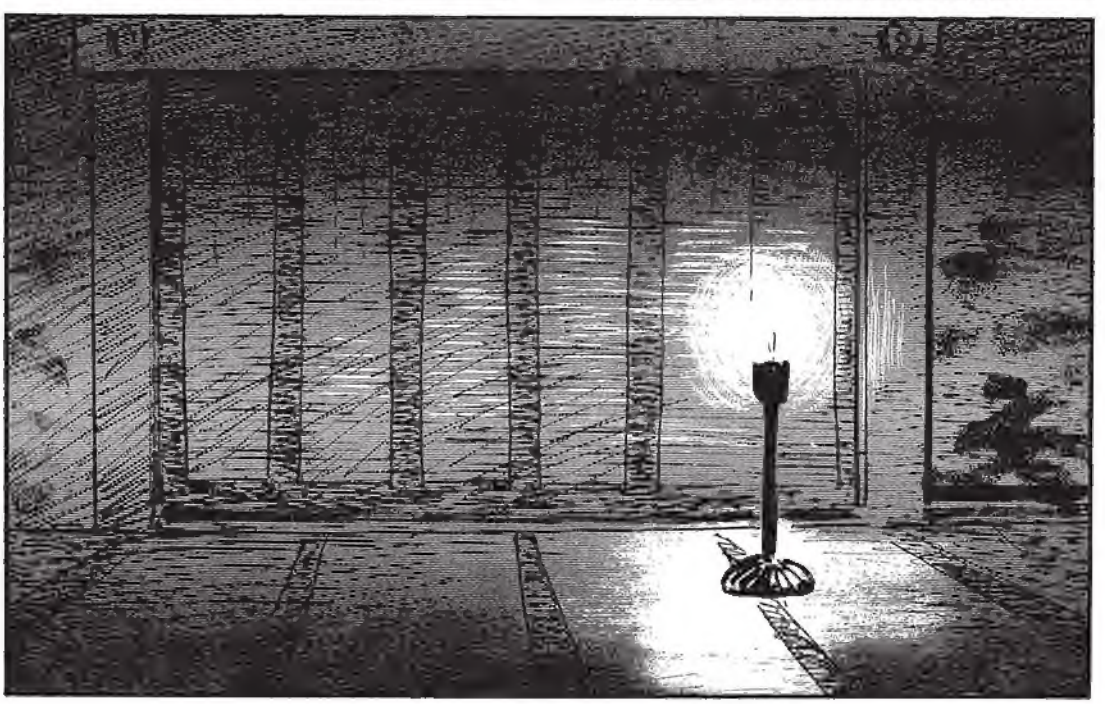
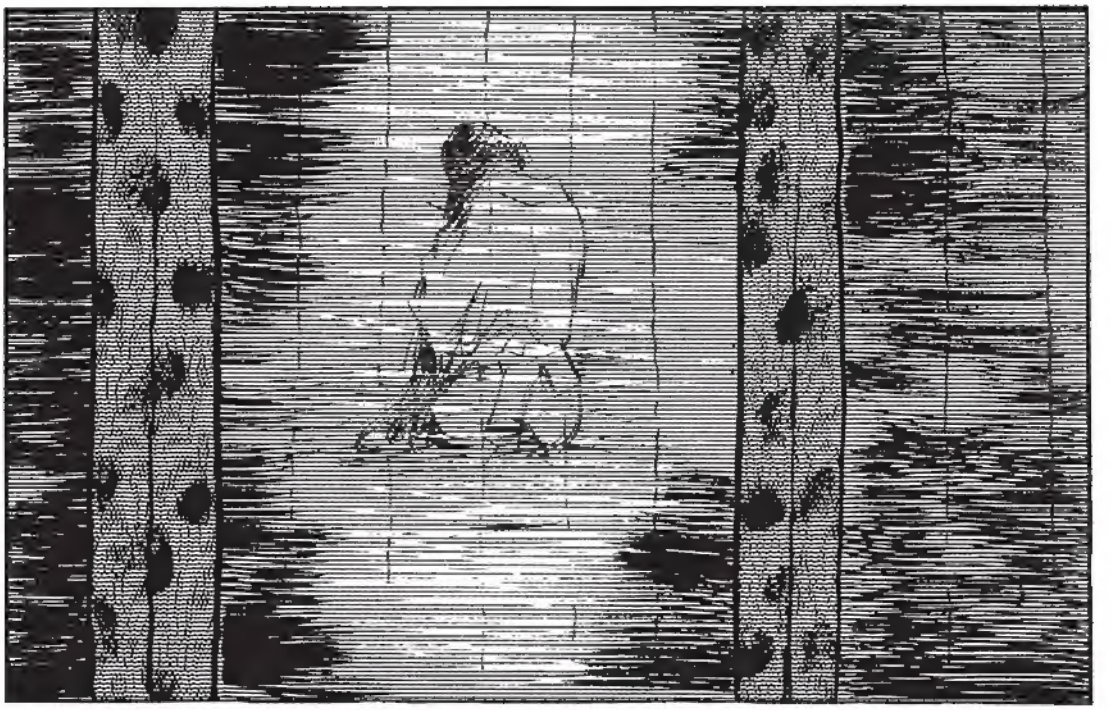
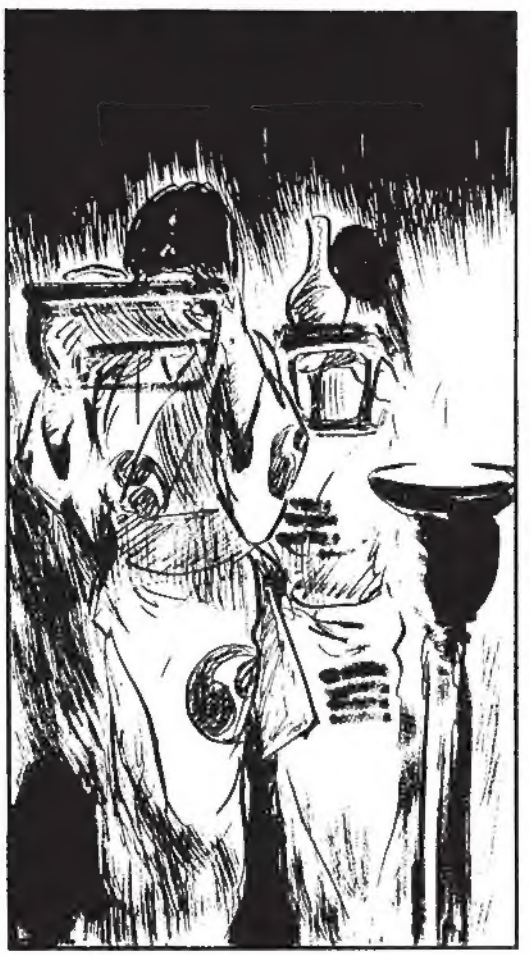
Chapter On Shogyō Mujō

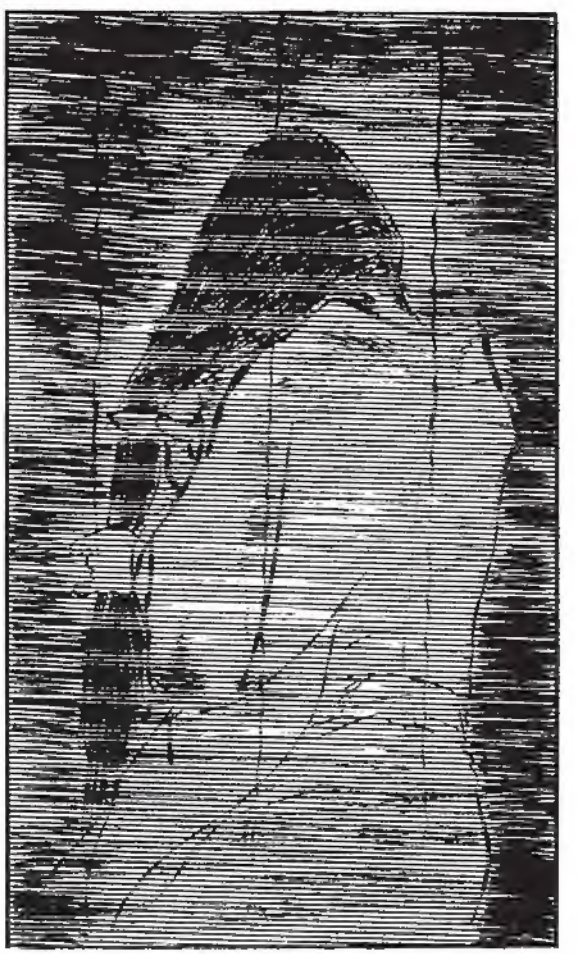
No. 1: Life's Greatest Difficulty

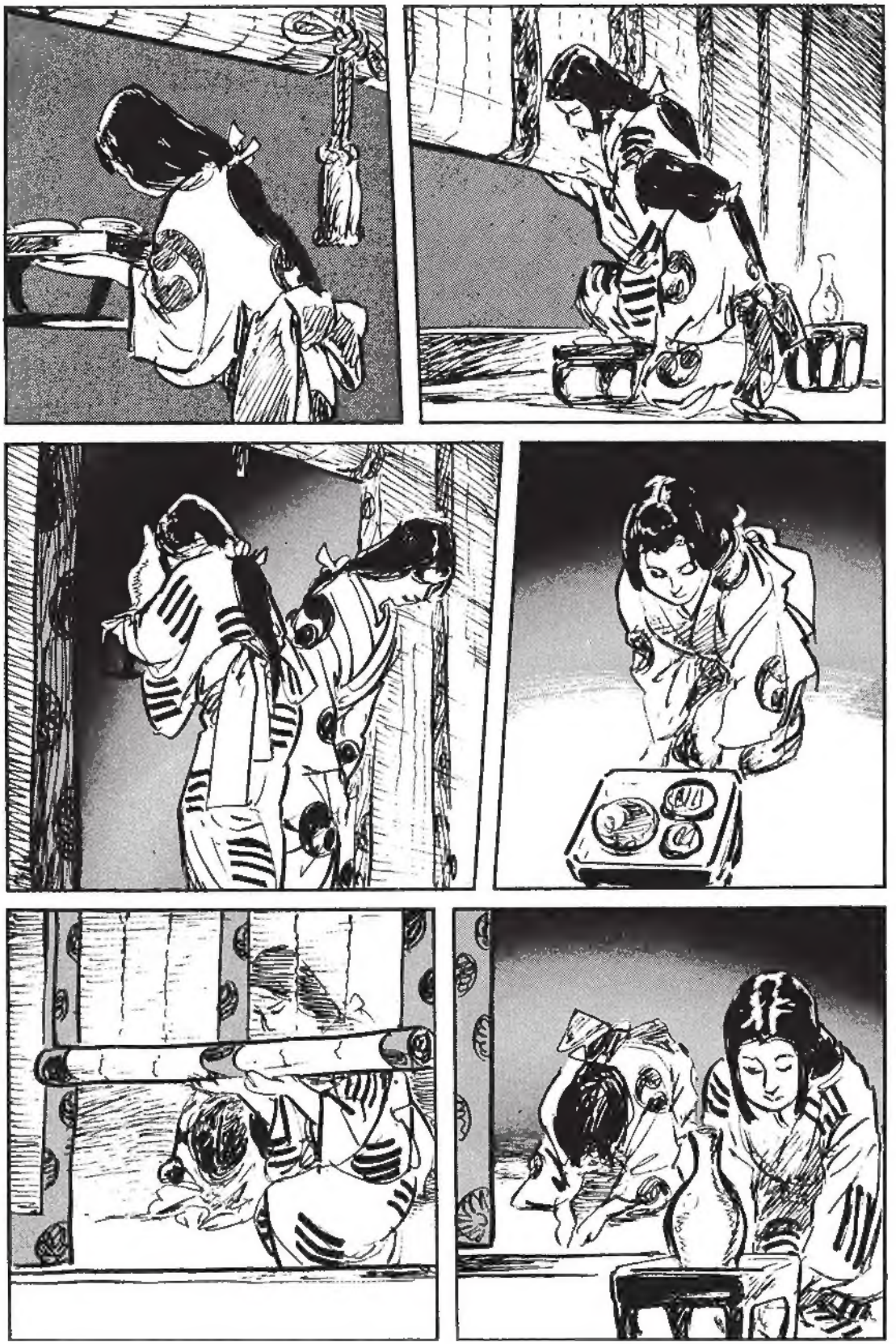


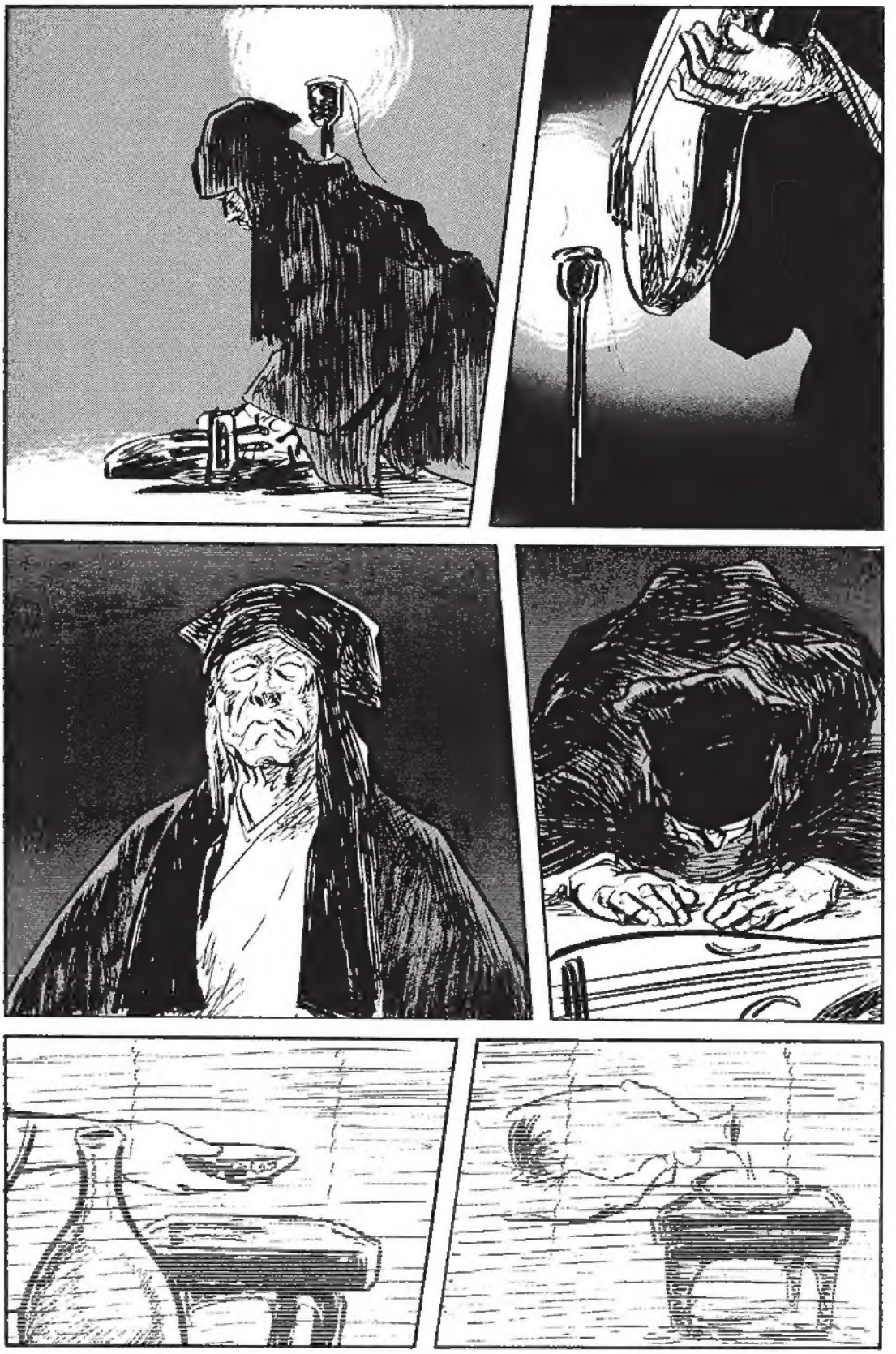


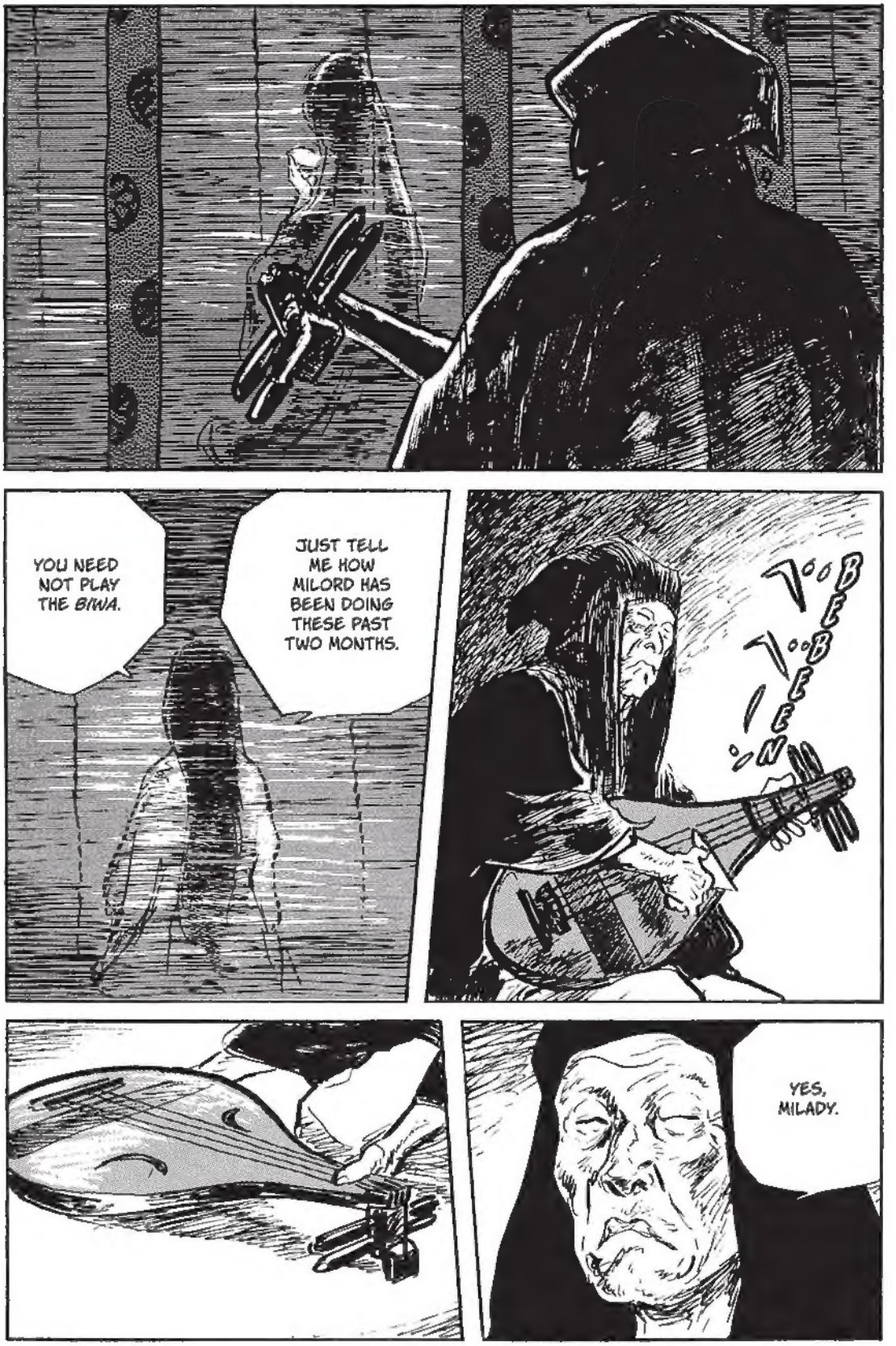


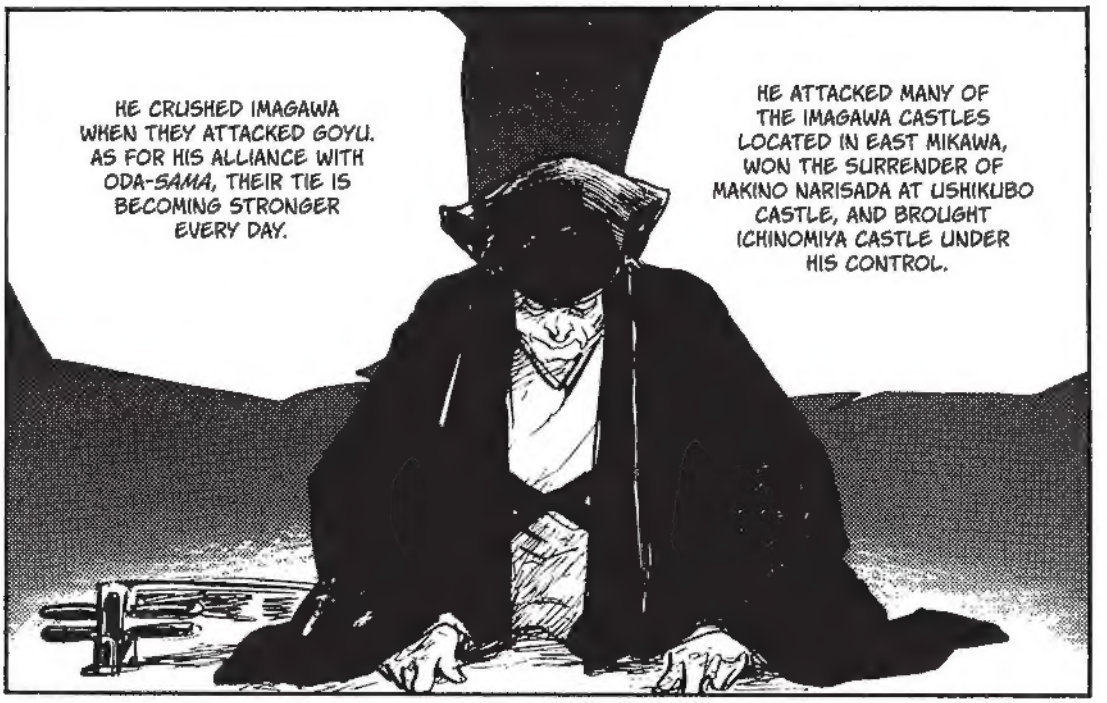


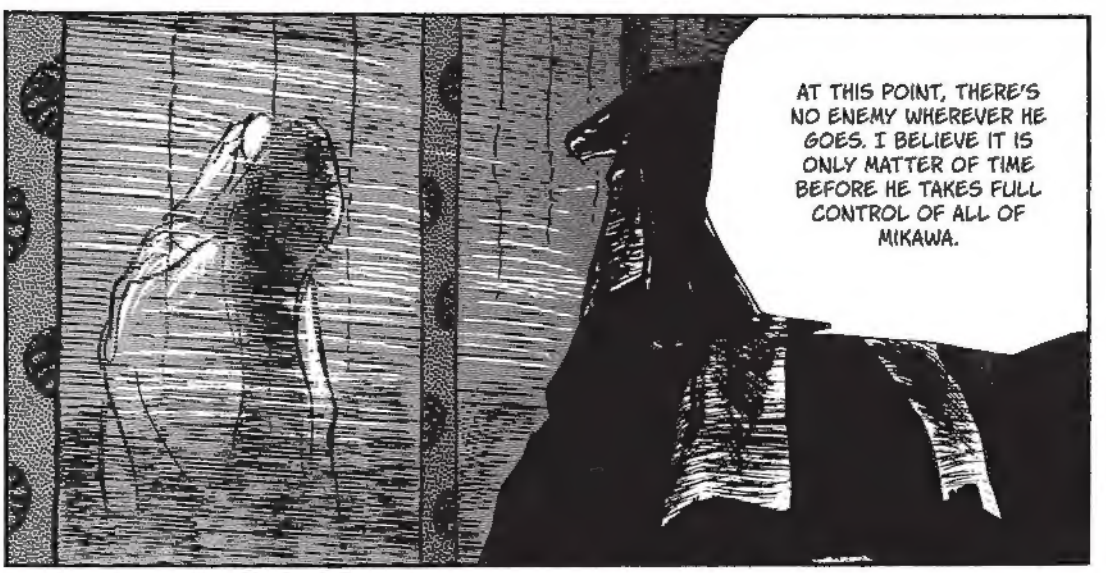


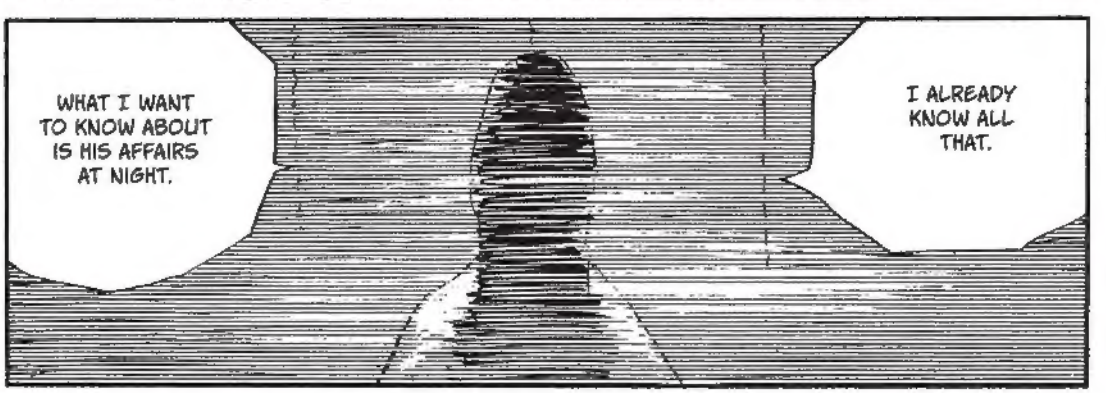


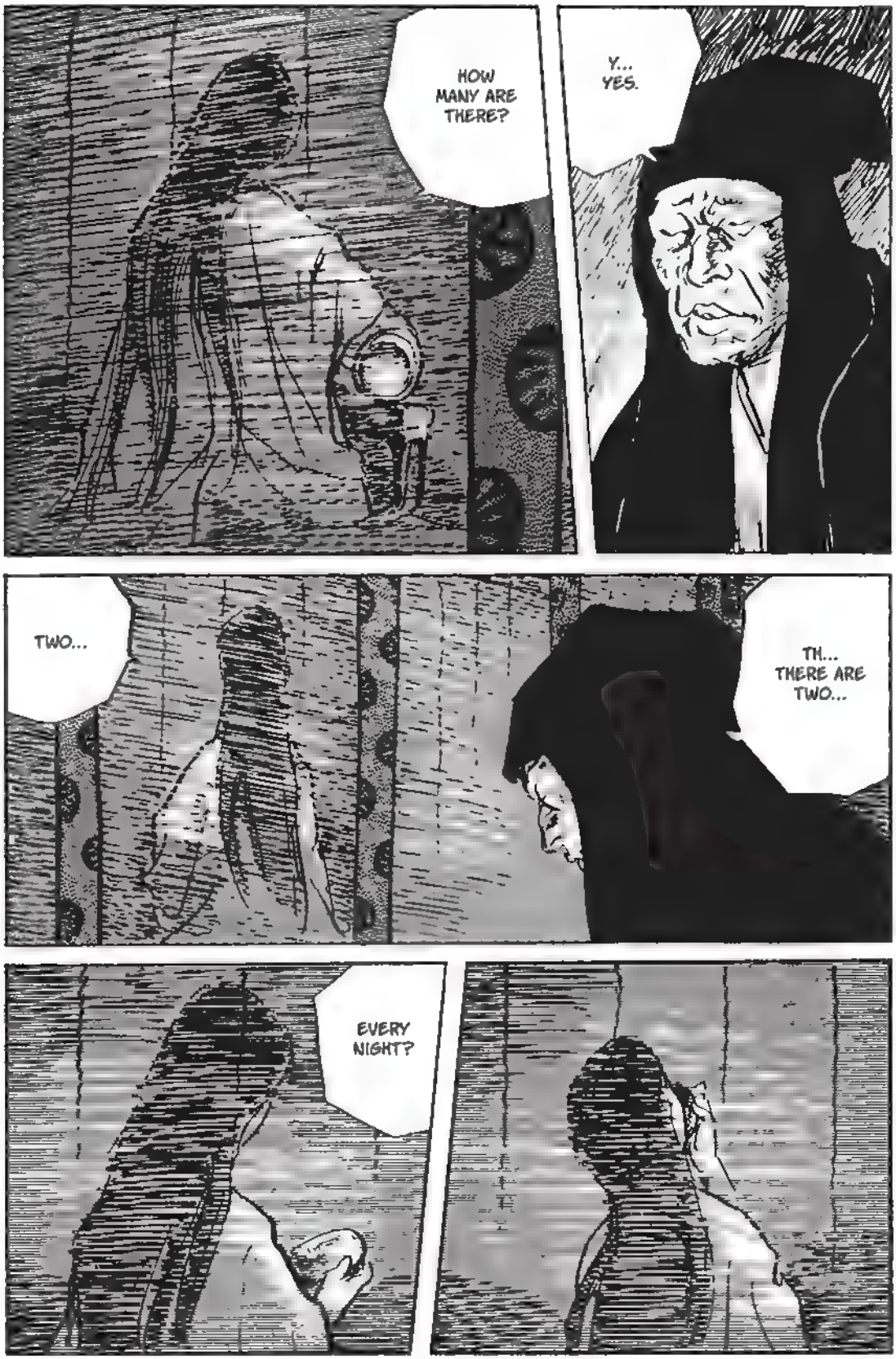


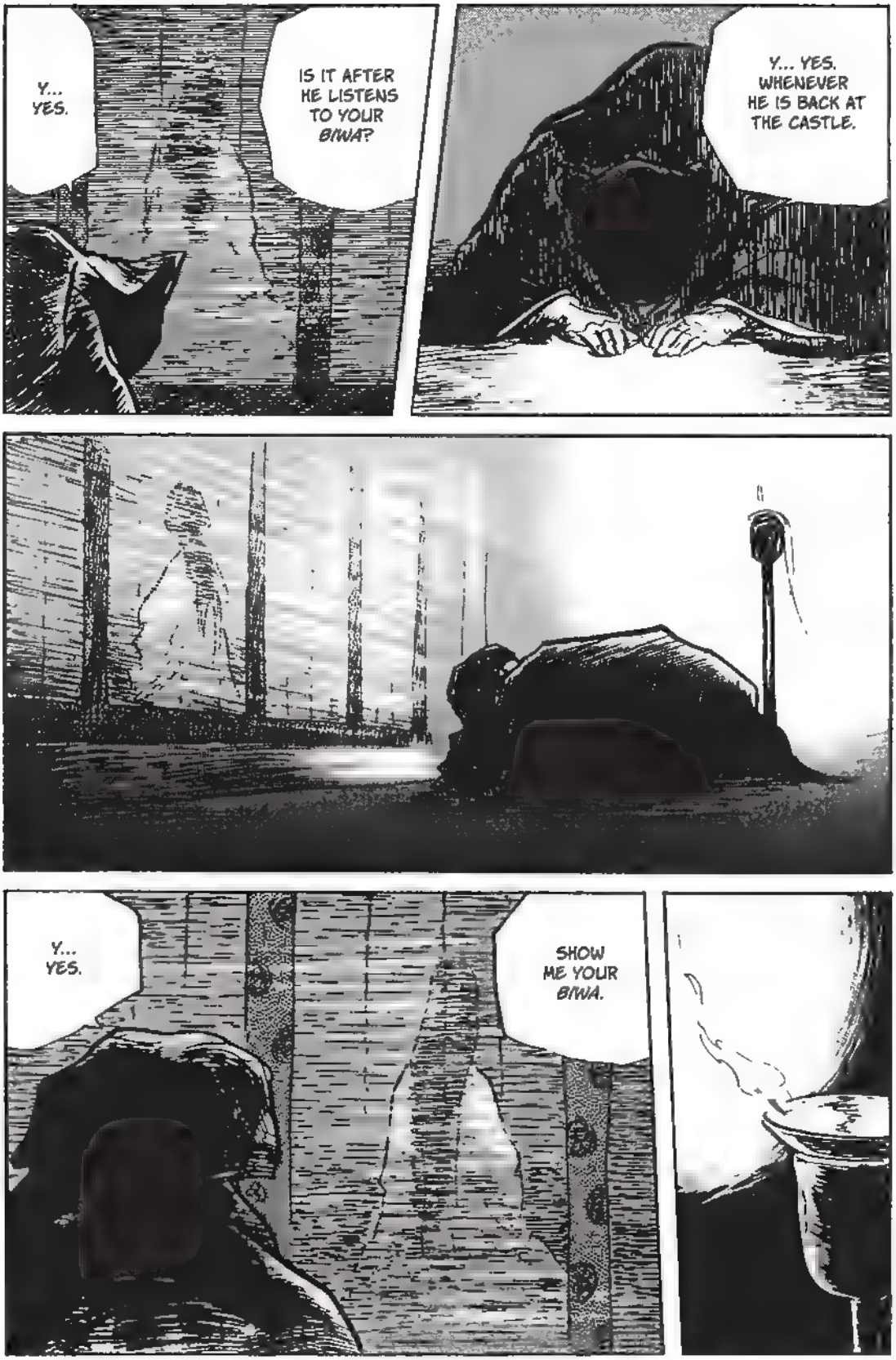

YOU NEED NOT PLAY THE *BIWA*.
JUST TELL ME HOW MILORD HAS BEEN DOING THESE PAST TWO MONTHS.
BEBEEN
YES, MILADY.

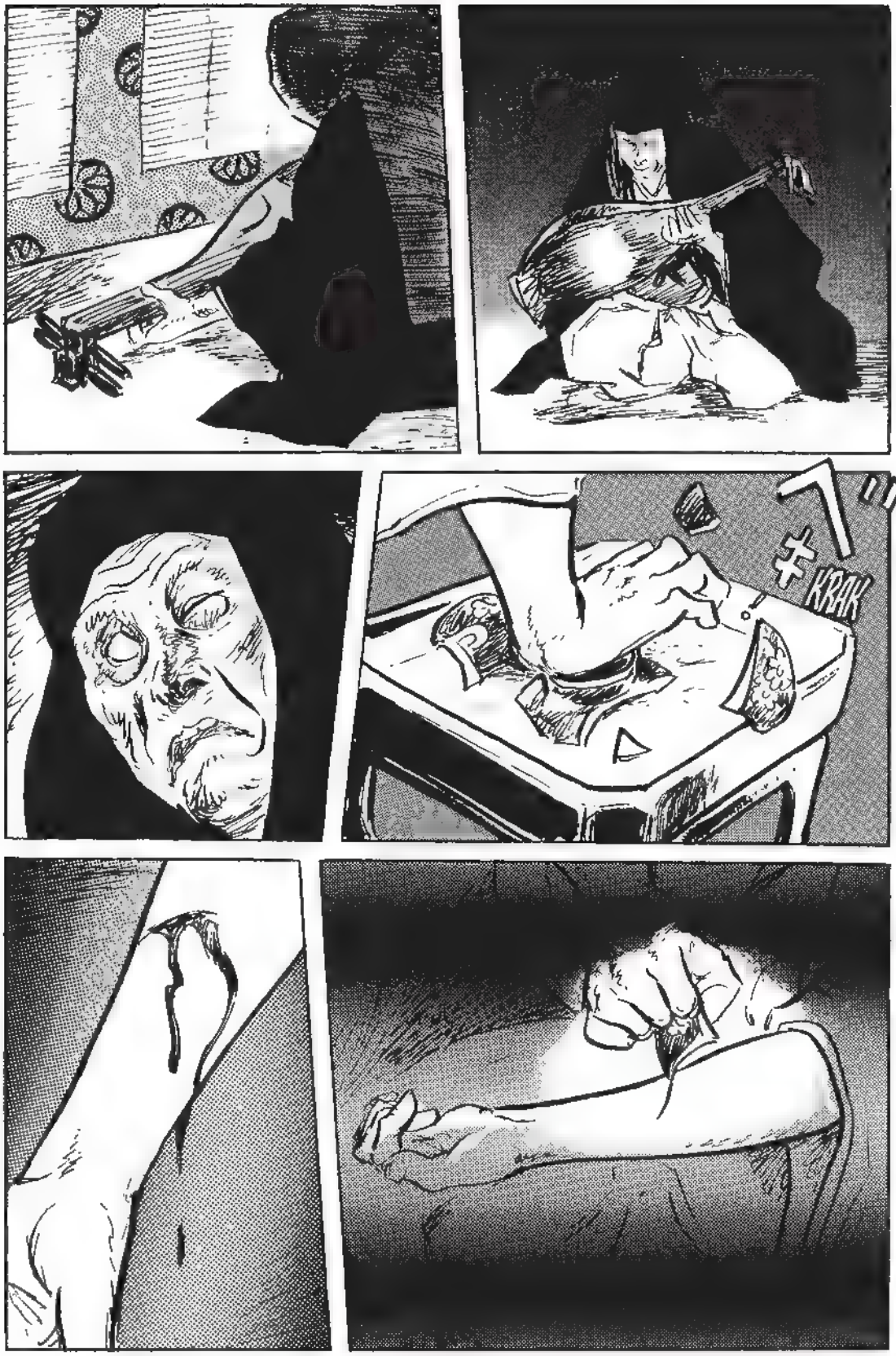

HE CRUSHED IMAGAWA WHEN THEY ATTACKED GOYU. AS FOR HIS ALLIANCE WITH ODA-SAMA, THEIR TIE IS BECOMING STRONGER EVERY DAY.
HE ATTACKED MANY OF THE IMAGAWA CASTLES LOCATED IN EAST MIKAWA, WON THE SURRENDER OF MAKINO NARISADA AT USHIKUBO CASTLE, AND BROUGHT ICHINOMIYA CASTLE UNDER HIS CONTROL.

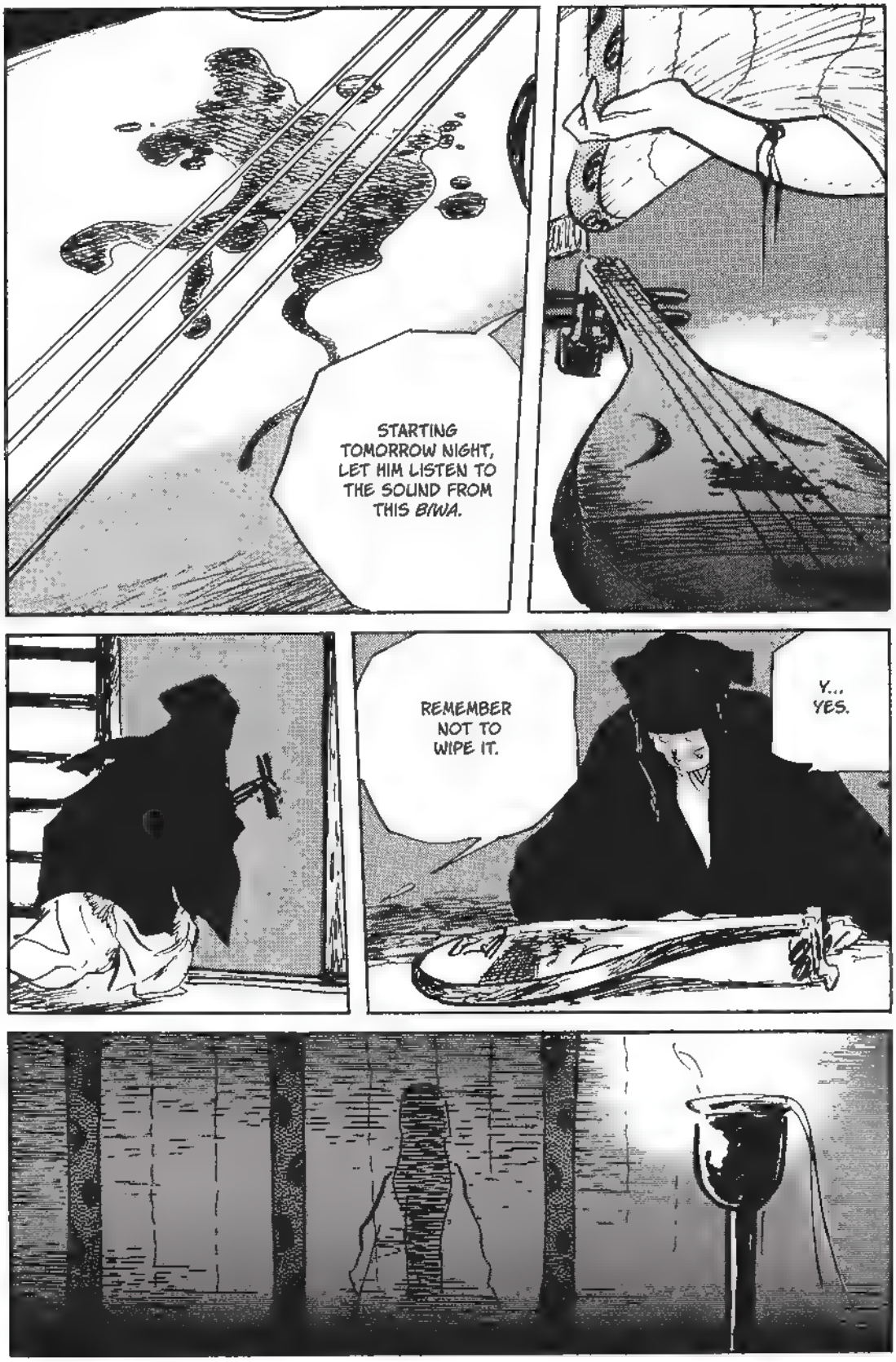

AT THIS POINT, THERE'S NO ENEMY WHEREVER HE GOES. I BELIEVE IT IS ONLY MATTER OF TIME BEFORE HE TAKES FULL CONTROL OF ALL OF MIKAWA.

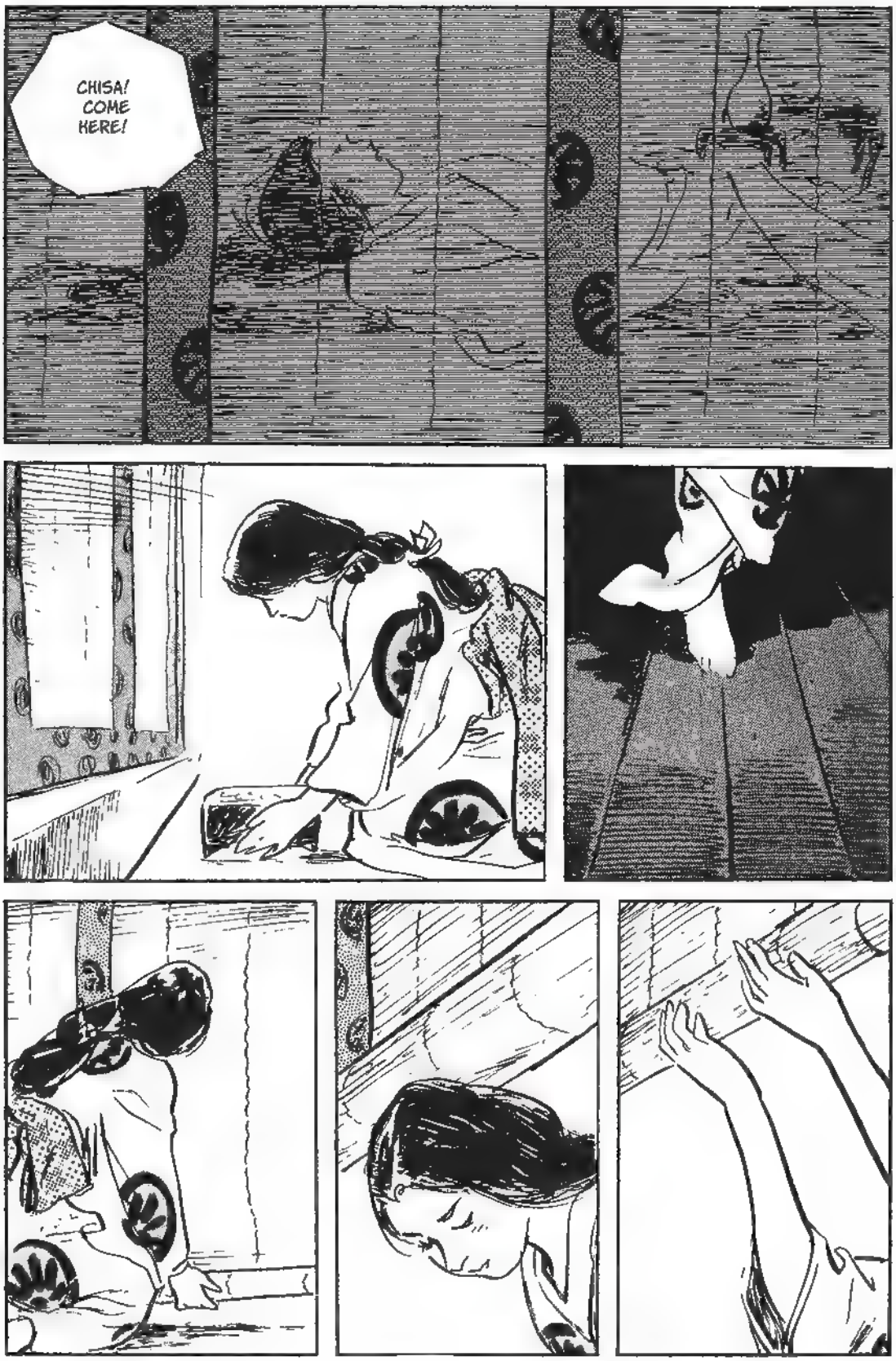

WHAT I WANT TO KNOW ABOUT IS HIS AFFAIRS AT NIGHT.
I ALREADY KNOW ALL THAT.

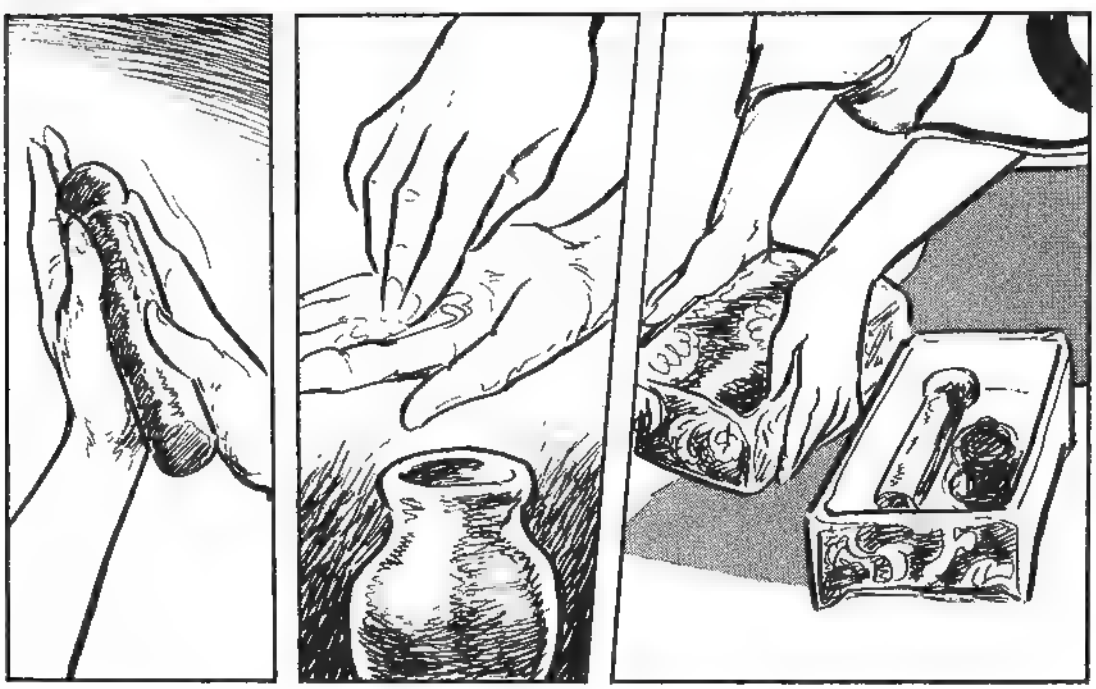

HOW MANY ARE THERE?
Y... YES.
TWO...
TH... THERE ARE TWO...
EVERY NIGHT?

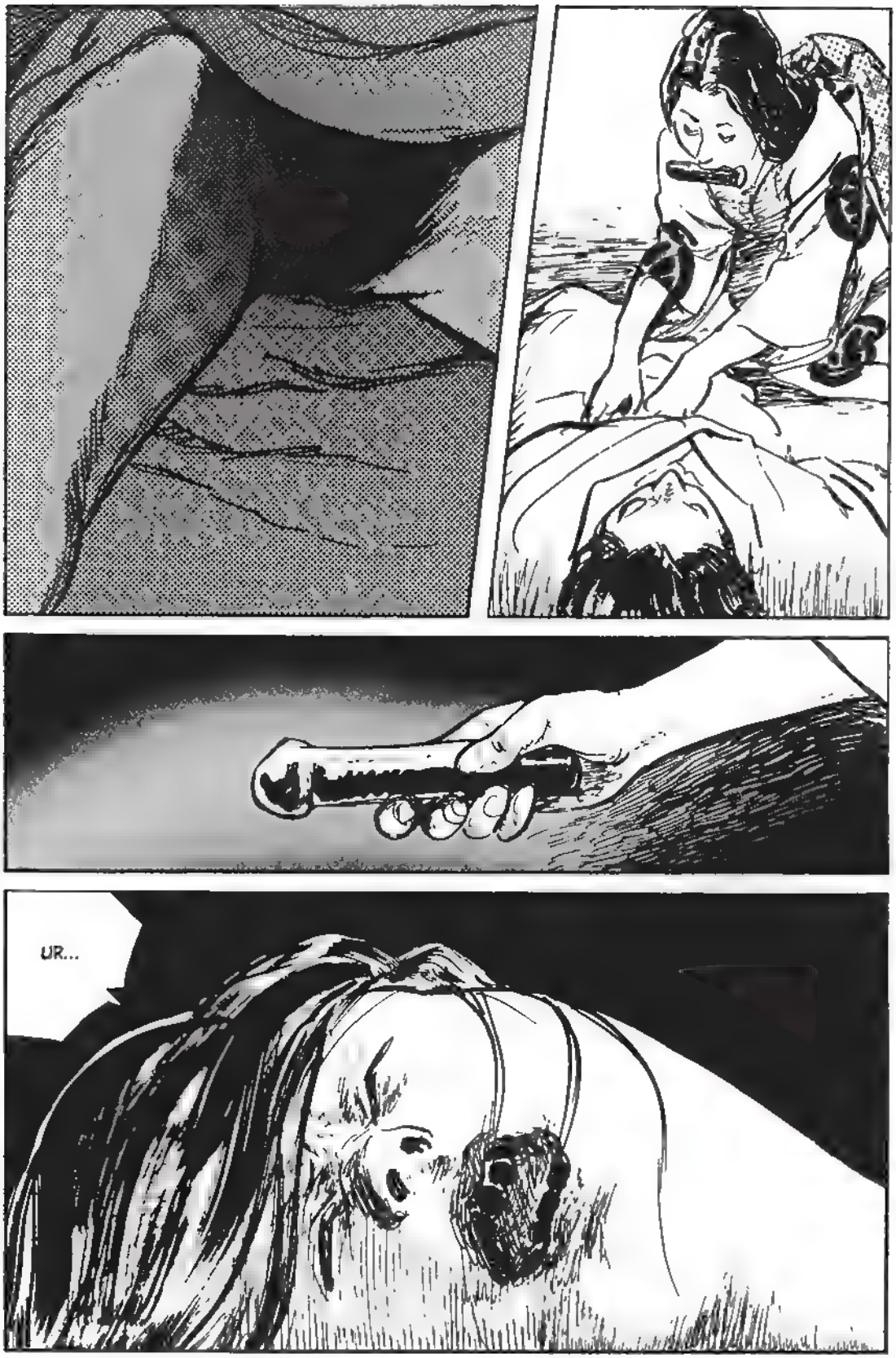

Y... YES.
IS IT AFTER HE LISTENS TO YOUR BIWA?
Y... YES. WHENEVER HE IS BACK AT THE CASTLE.
Y... YES.
SHOW ME YOUR BIWA.


KRAK


STARTING TOMORROW NIGHT, LET HIM LISTEN TO THE SOUND FROM THIS *BIWA*.
REMEMBER NOT TO WIPE IT.
Y... YES.

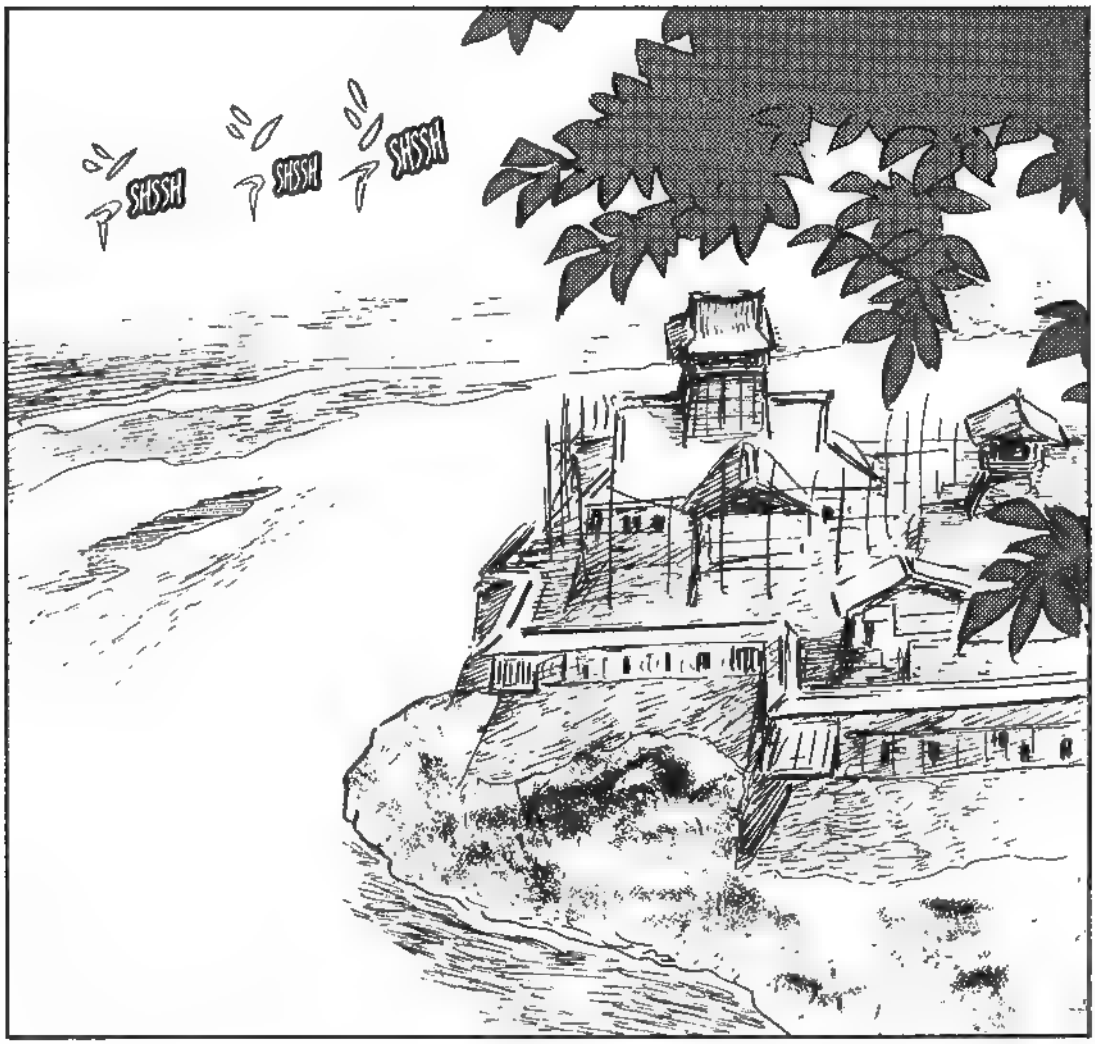

CHISA!
COME
HERE!

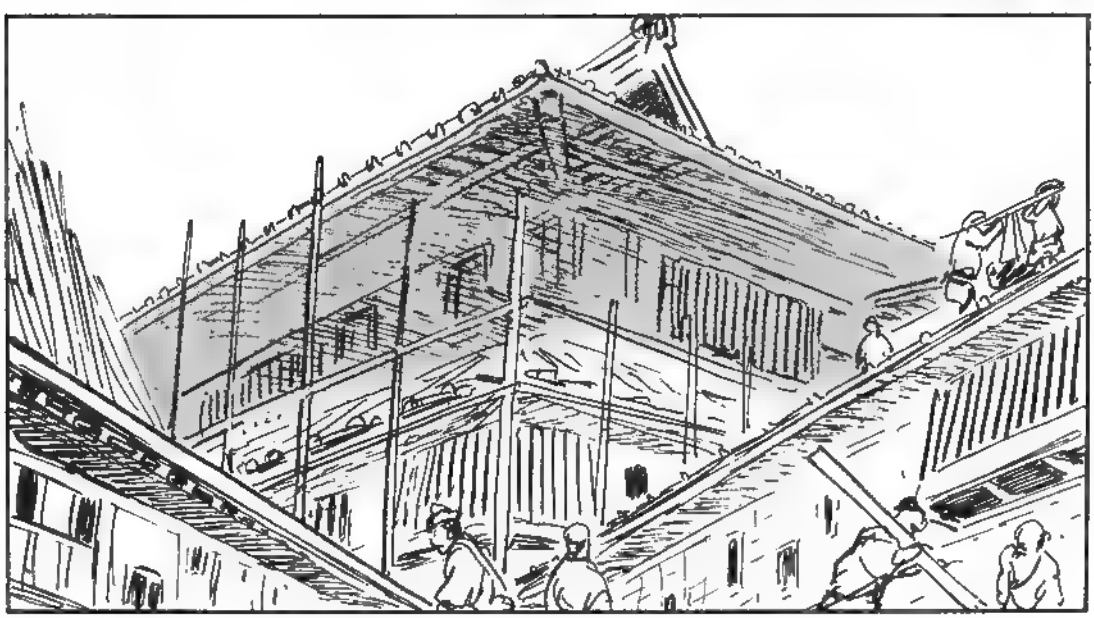



UR...

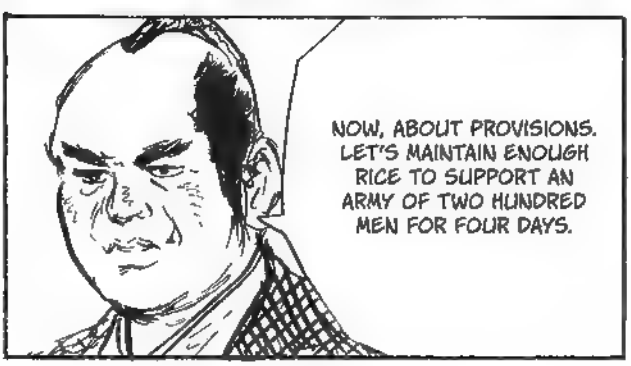
あ
AHHH
DO IT... A LITTLE SLOWER.
HAA
HAA

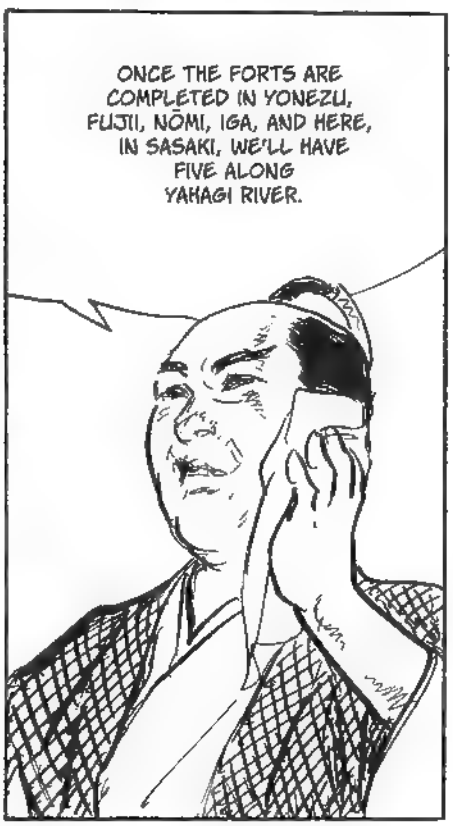
本領安堵状
REASSURANCE OF FIEF
IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU RETURN...
WHERE ARE YOU, HANZŌ.
KAK
THINGS ARE GOING TOO WELL...
THAT MAKES ME MORE AND MORE UNEASY.


SHSSH
SHSSH
SHSSH



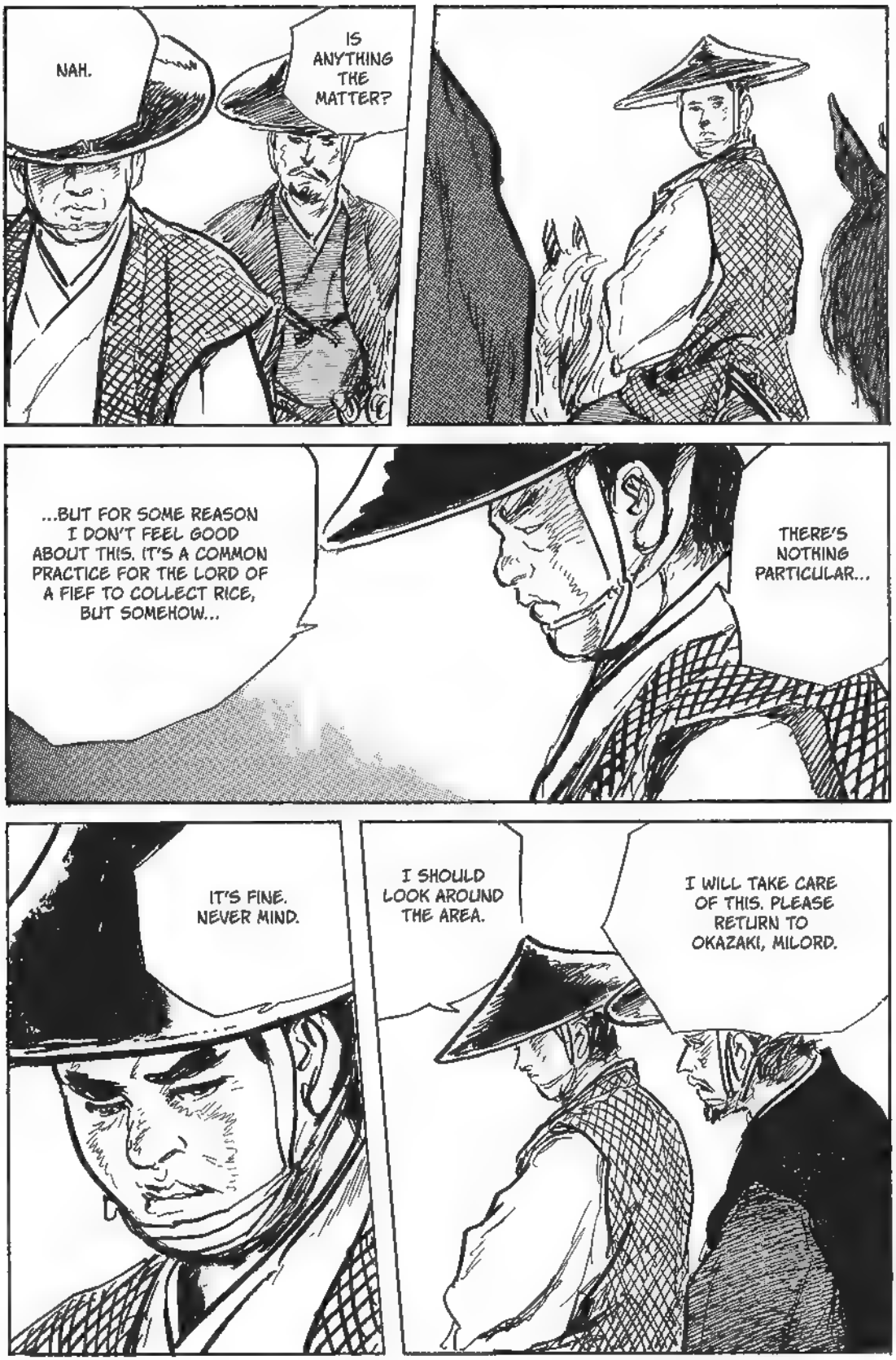
NO, MILORD.
THAT'S NOT BAD, IS IT?

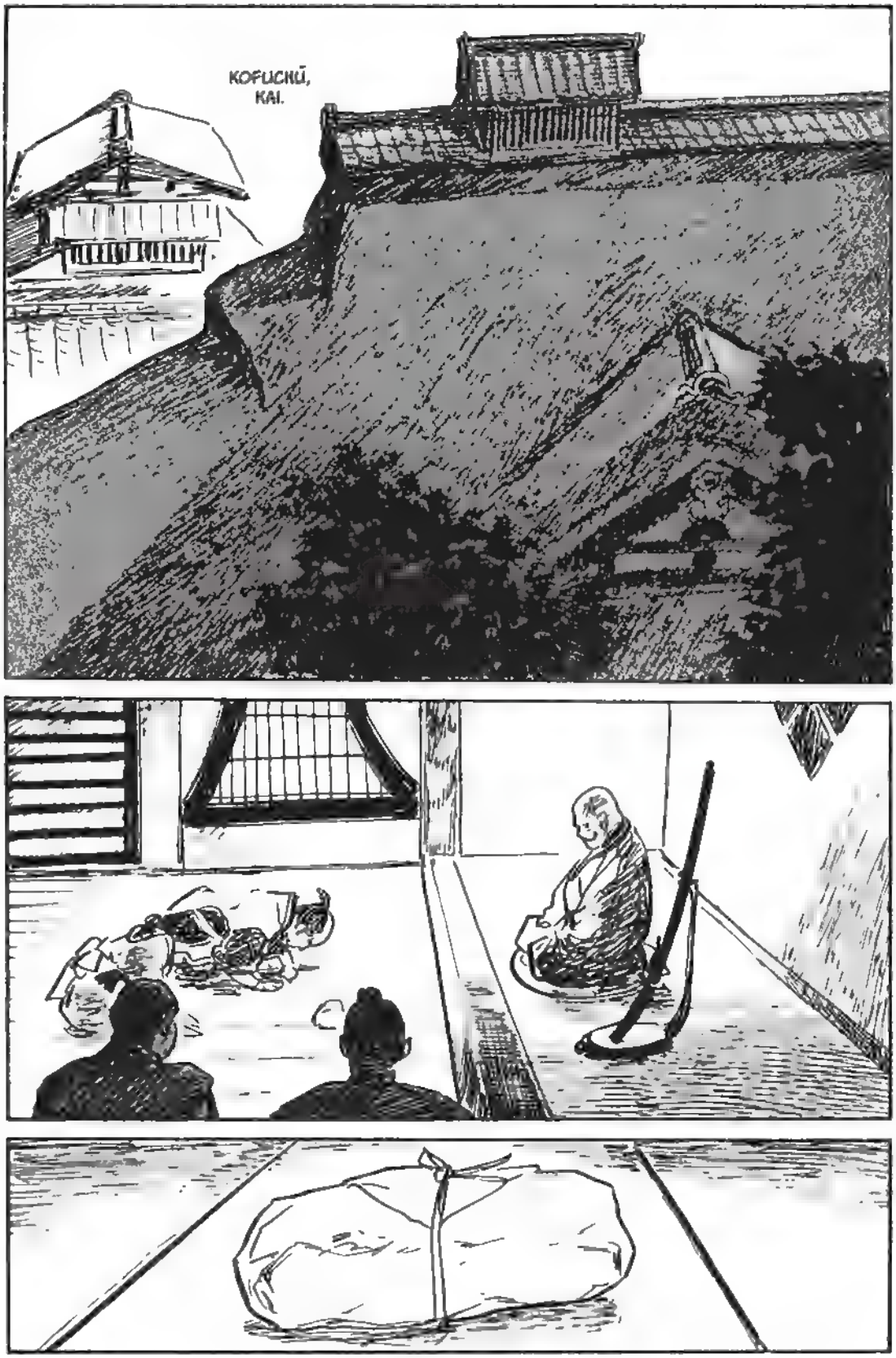

NOW, ABOUT PROVISIONS. LET'S MAINTAIN ENOUGH RICE TO SUPPORT AN ARMY OF TWO HUNDRED MEN FOR FOUR DAYS.

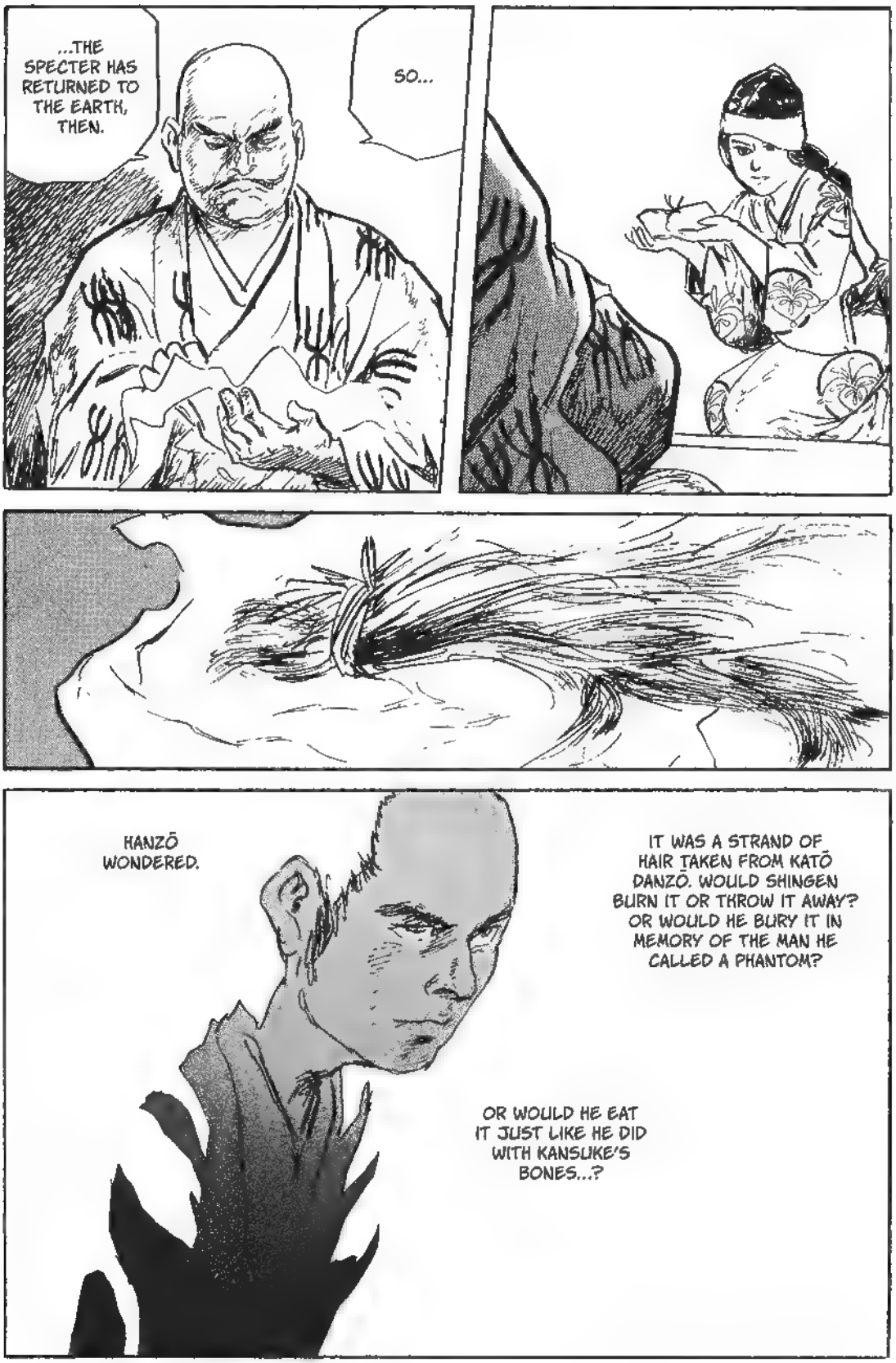

ONCE THE FORTS ARE COMPLETED IN YONEZU, FUJII, NŌMI, IGA, AND HERE, IN SASAKI, WE'LL HAVE FIVE ALONG YAHAGI RIVER.

MASAAKI HERE WILL BE COLLECTING RICE FROM ALL OVER SASAKI.
SIR.
MASACHIKA, WHAT'S THE STATUS ON THAT?
ER, WAIT. I'LL COME ALONG. IT'S A GOOD OCCASION FOR ME TO GET TO KNOW THE AREA.
GOOD. GET STARTED AT ONCE.
HM?!

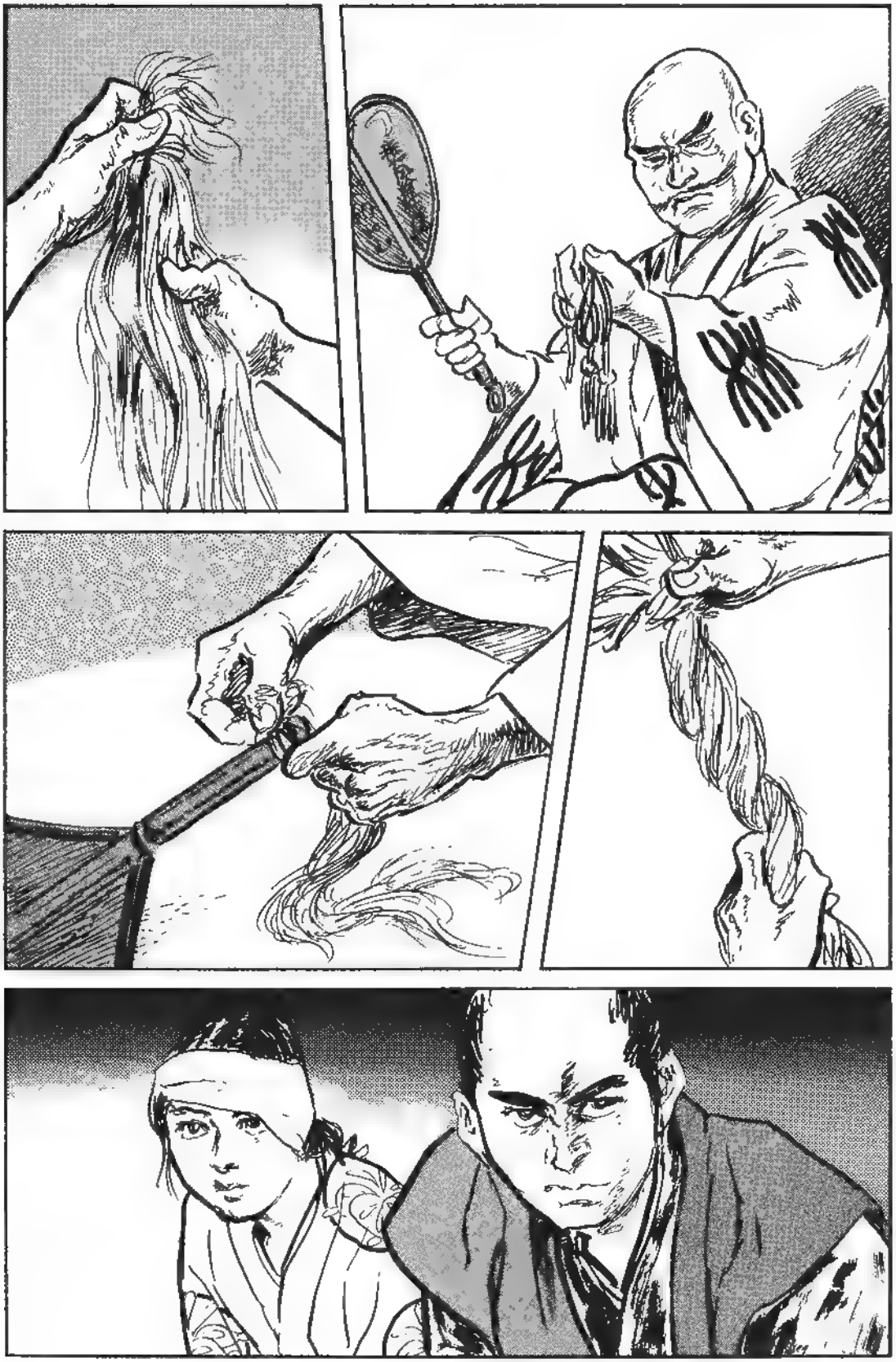
HE FELT IT WAS FOREBODING.
I DIDN'T EVEN TAKE A STEP...
BUT HE WASN'T A GOD, AND IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO KNOW THAT COLLECTING RICE IN SASAKI WOULD BRING ON AN EVENT...
...THAT WAS LATER SAID TO BE THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY OF HIS LIFE.


NAH.
IS ANYTHING THE MATTER?
...BUT FOR SOME REASON I DON'T FEEL GOOD ABOUT THIS. IT'S A COMMON PRACTICE FOR THE LORD OF A FIEF TO COLLECT RICE, BUT SOMEHOW...
THERE'S NOTHING PARTICULAR...
IT'S FINE. NEVER MIND.
I SHOULD LOOK AROUND THE AREA.
I WILL TAKE CARE OF THIS. PLEASE RETURN TO OKAZAKI, MILORD.

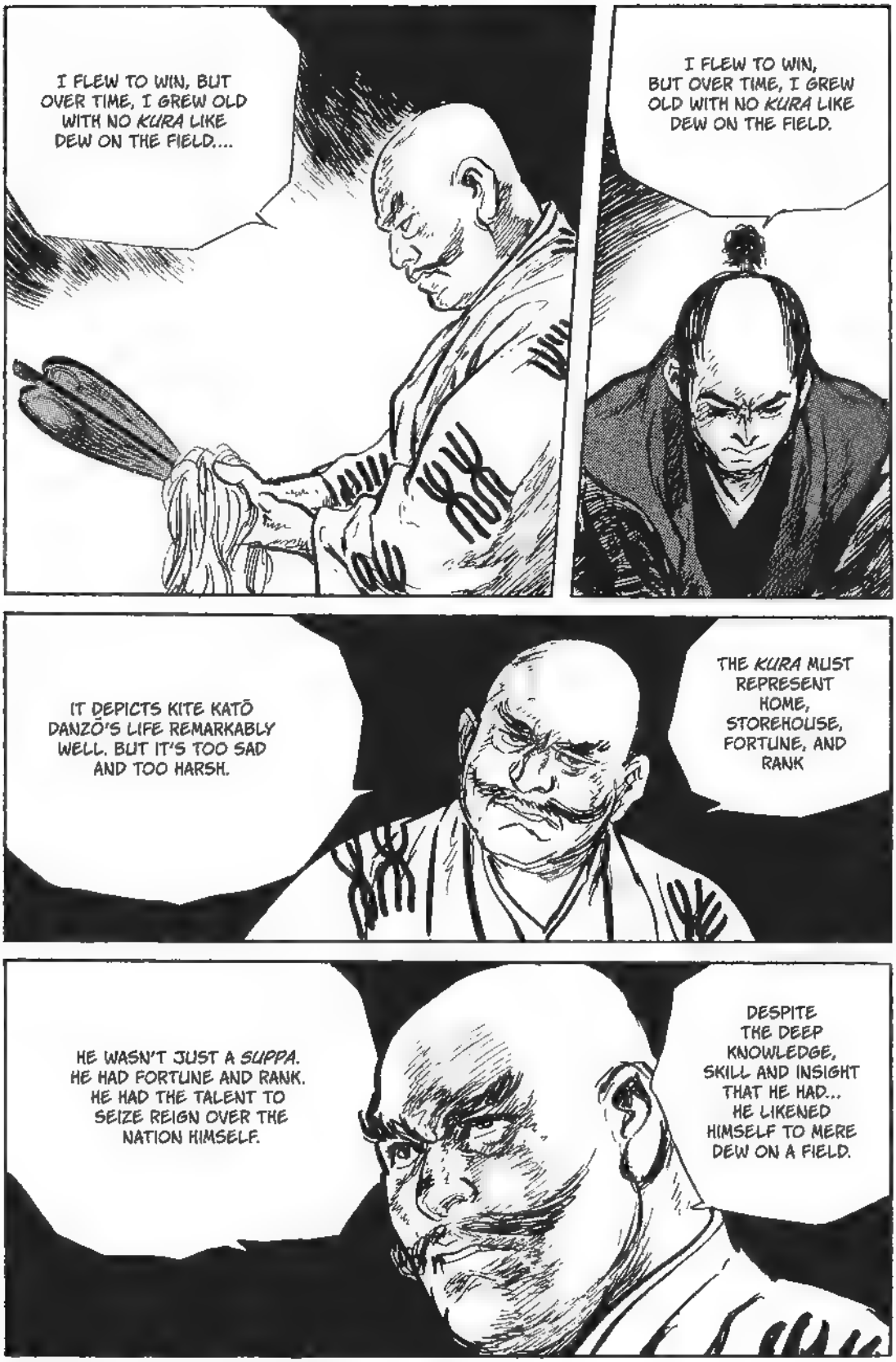

KOFUCHŪ,
KAI.


...THE SPECTER HAS RETURNED TO THE EARTH, THEN.
SO...
HANZŌ WONDERED.
IT WAS A STRAND OF HAIR TAKEN FROM KATŌ DANZŌ. WOULD SHINGEN BURN IT OR THROW IT AWAY? OR WOULD HE BURY IT IN MEMORY OF THE MAN HE CALLED A PHANTOM?
OR WOULD HE EAT IT JUST LIKE HE DID WITH KANSUKE'S BONES...?

YES SIR.
BRING ME MY GUNBAI.
MOVE AS SWIFT AS A WIND, STAY AS SILENT AS A FOREST
ATTACK AS FIERCE AS FIRE, DEFEND AS UNMOVABLE AS A MOUNTAIN.

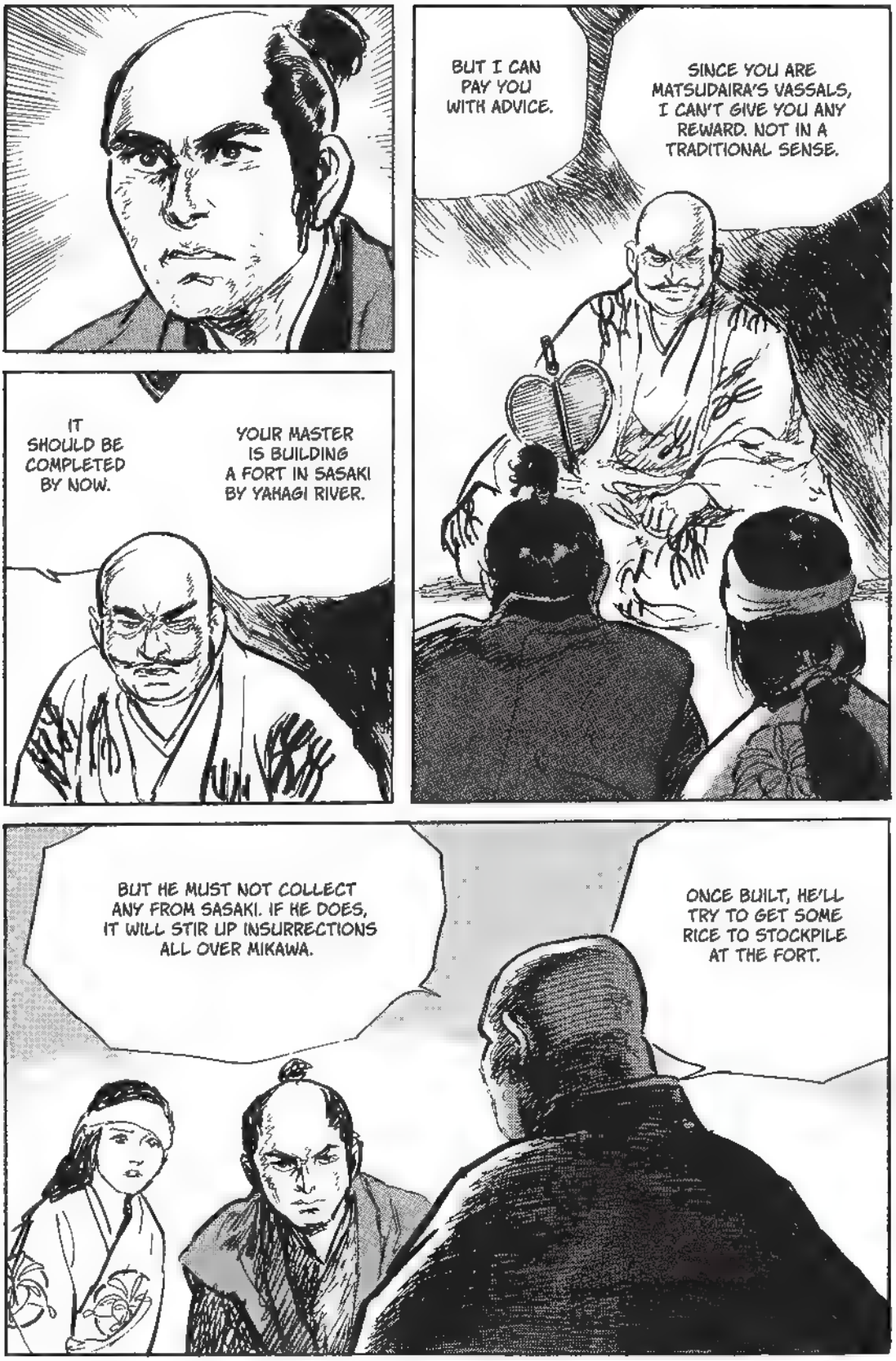


YES SIR.
TELL ME THE POEM THE SPECTER COMPOSED BEFORE HE DIED.

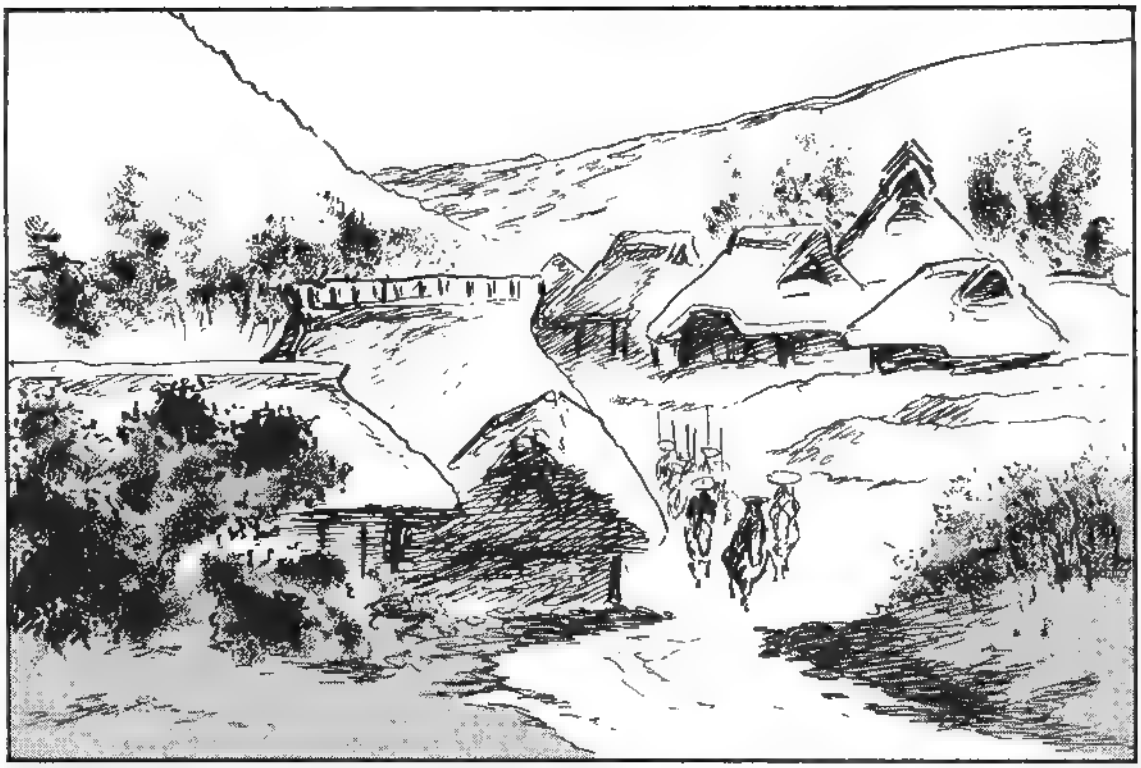

I FLEW TO WIN, BUT OVER TIME, I GREW OLD WITH NO *KURA* LIKE DEW ON THE FIELD....
I FLEW TO WIN, BUT OVER TIME, I GREW OLD WITH NO *KURA* LIKE DEW ON THE FIELD.
IT DEPICTS KITE KATŌ DANZŌ'S LIFE REMARKABLY WELL. BUT IT'S TOO SAD AND TOO HARSH.
THE *KURA* MUST REPRESENT HOME, STOREHOUSE, FORTUNE, AND RANK
HE WASN'T JUST A *SUPPA*. HE HAD FORTUNE AND RANK. HE HAD THE TALENT TO SEIZE REIGN OVER THE NATION HIMSELF.
DESPITE THE DEEP KNOWLEDGE, SKILL AND INSIGHT THAT HE HAD... HE LIKENED HIMSELF TO MERE DEW ON A FIELD.

DANZŌ, YOU MUST REGRET THAT YOU HAD TO VANISH LIKE DEW BEFORE YOU COULD TERMINATE ME.
FROM NOW ON, STAY HERE.
AND POSSESS MY *GUNBAI* -- IT INFLUENCES THE OUTCOME OF WAR -- AND WATCH ME BEATEN AND KILLED. THAT SHOULD SETTLE SOME OF YOUR OLD SCORES.
BE WITH ME WHEREVER THE BATTLE TAKES PLACE.

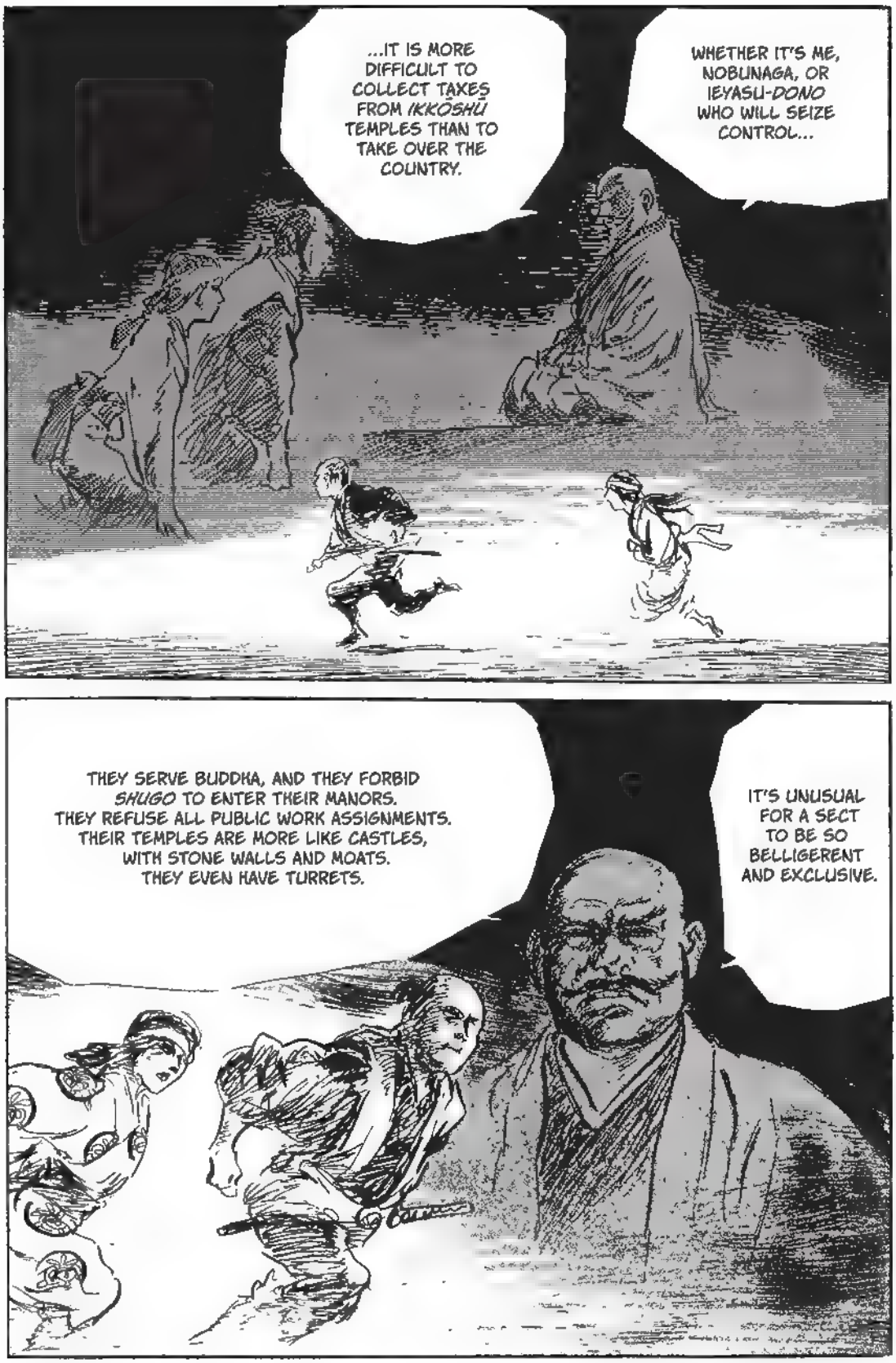
HA HA HA HA HA.
BUT KEEP IN MIND, I WON'T GIVE YOU FREE REIN.
HA HA HA HA HA.
YOU CAN WAVE MY GUNBAI ANY WAY YOU WANT SO I'LL LOSE THE BATTLE.
UWA HA HA HA HA HA.
YOU MAY BE A SPECTER, BUT I AM A TIGER OF KAI.
HANZŌ. TSUKUMO. THANK YOU.

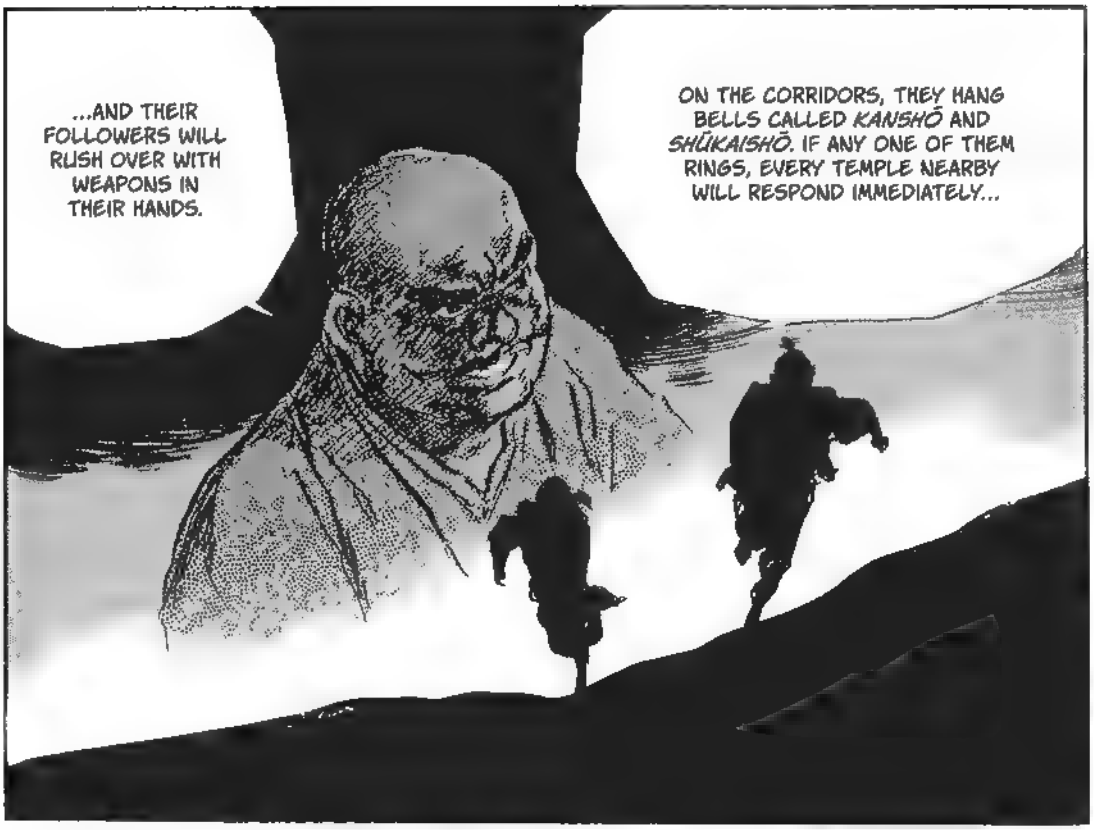

BUT I CAN PAY YOU WITH ADVICE.
SINCE YOU ARE MATSUDAIRA'S VASSALS, I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANY REWARD. NOT IN A TRADITIONAL SENSE.
IT SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY NOW.
YOUR MASTER IS BUILDING A FORT IN SASAKI BY YAHAGI RIVER.
BUT HE MUST NOT COLLECT ANY FROM SASAKI. IF HE DOES, IT WILL STIR UP INSURRECTIONS ALL OVER MIKAWA.
ONCE BUILT, HE'LL TRY TO GET SOME RICE TO STOCKPILE AT THE FORT.

AND PREVENT IT!
FLY BACK HANZO!



WHERE DID THE VILLAGERS GO...?
IT'S SO QUIET. IT'S AS IF NO ONE IS AROUND.


...IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO COLLECT TAXES FROM *IKKŌSHU* TEMPLES THAN TO TAKE OVER THE COUNTRY.
WHETHER IT'S ME, NOBUNAGA, OR IEYASU-*DONO* WHO WILL SEIZE CONTROL...
THEY SERVE BUDDHA, AND THEY FORBID *SHUGO* TO ENTER THEIR MANORS. THEY REFUSE ALL PUBLIC WORK ASSIGNMENTS. THEIR TEMPLES ARE MORE LIKE CASTLES, WITH STONE WALLS AND MOATS. THEY EVEN HAVE TURRETS.
IT'S UNUSUAL FOR A SECT TO BE SO BELLIGERENT AND EXCLUSIVE.


...AND THEIR FOLLOWERS WILL RUSH OVER WITH WEAPONS IN THEIR HANDS.
ON THE CORRIDORS, THEY HANG BELLS CALLED *KANSHŌ* AND *SHŪKAISHŌ*. IF ANY ONE OF THEM RINGS, EVERY TEMPLE NEARBY WILL RESPOND IMMEDIATELY...

IT'S BECAUSE THEY THINK OF DEATH AS GREAT JOY.
THESE FOLLOWERS ARE STRONG. TERRIBLY STRONG.

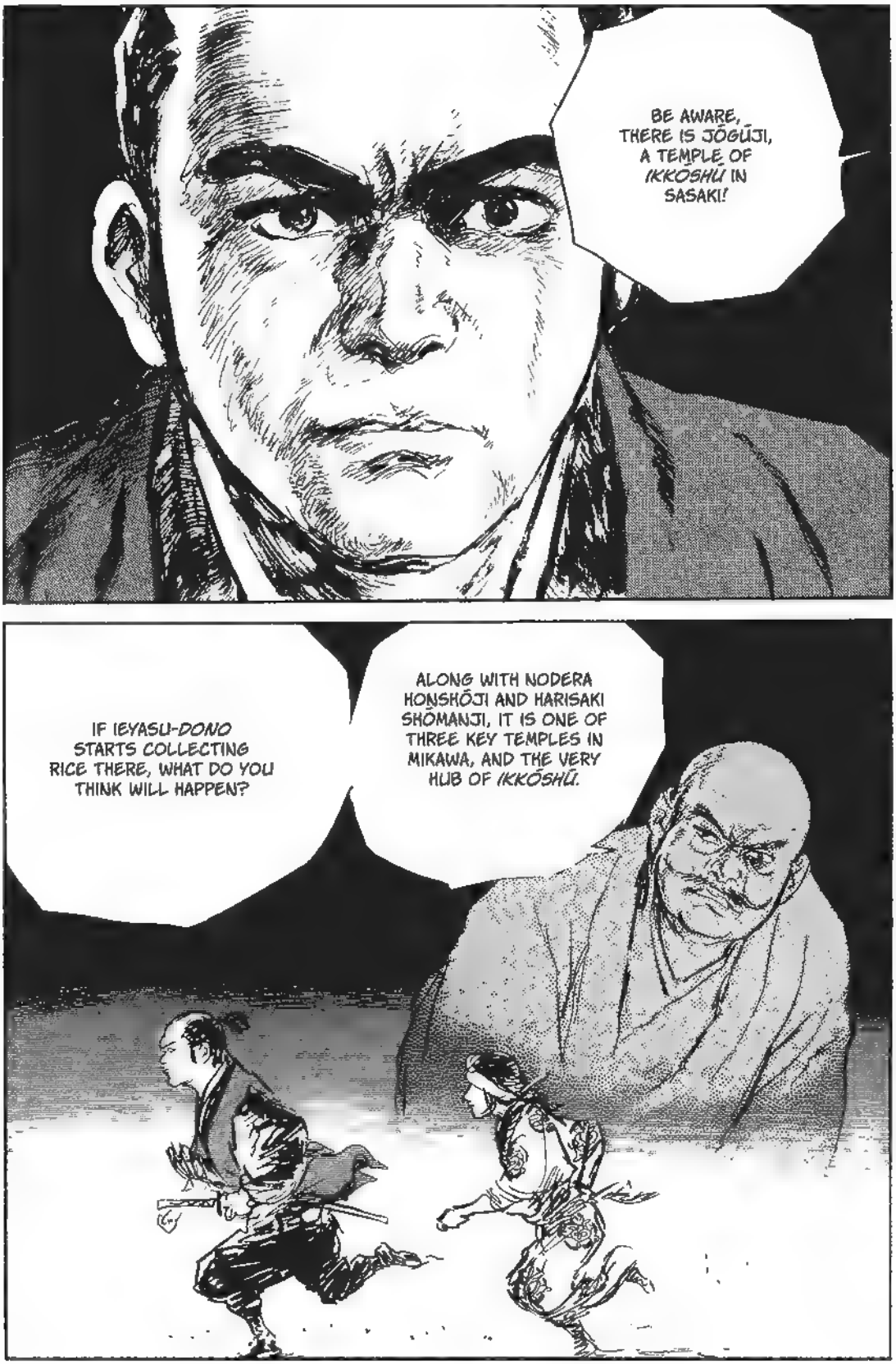
SO FOR THEM, DEATH IS NO DEATH BUT A PATH OF LIFE TO BE FOLLOWED.

THIS LIFE ON EARTH IS CONSIDERED TEMPORARY. THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN AMIDA BUDDHA ARE PROMISED A PEACEFUL LIFE AFTER DEATH.

...BUT A ROAD THAT LEADS TO PARADISE.

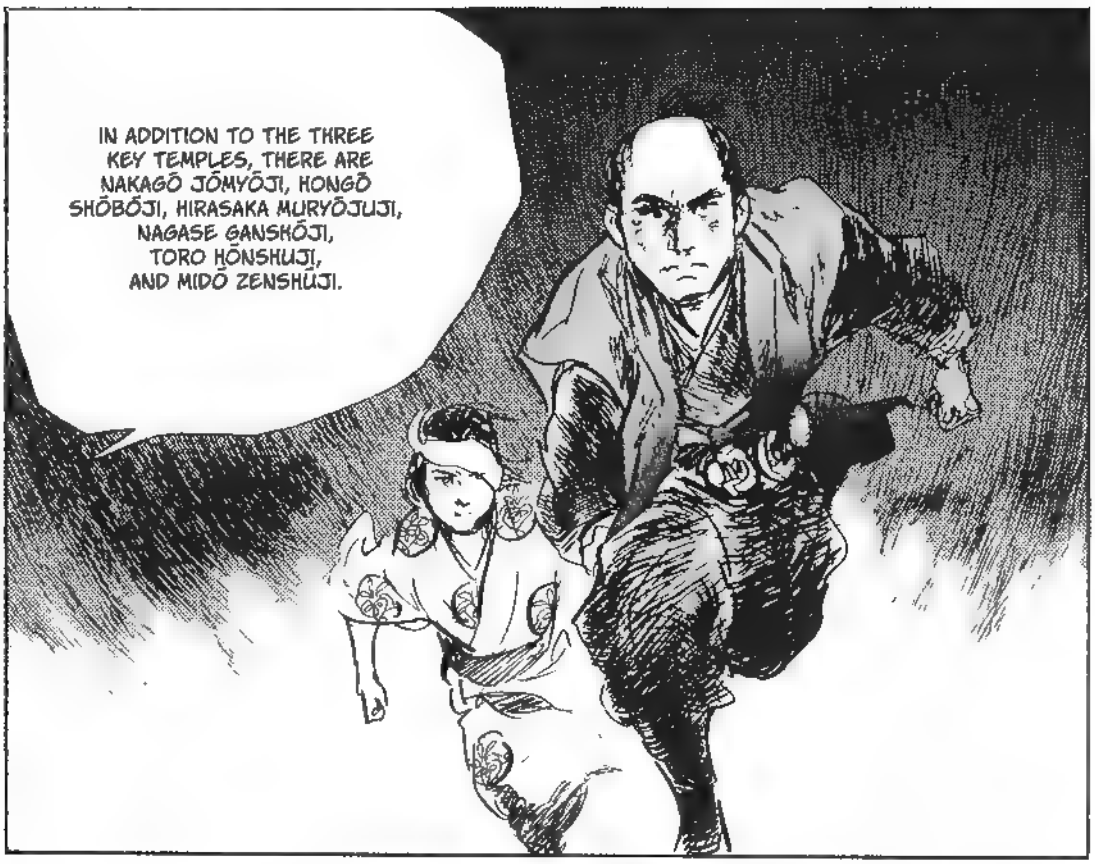
PASSING FROM LIFE ON EARTH IS NOT ETERNAL DEATH...

IKKŌSHŪ ADVOCATES NO BURDEN OF TAXES, AND THEY REFUSE INTERVENTION BY AUTHORITY.
THERE ARE MANY LOCAL SAMURAI AMONG THEIR ADHERENTS.
AND MIKAWA'S IKKŌSHŪ IS ESPECIALLY STRONG AND BIG.


BE AWARE, THERE IS JŌGŪJI, A TEMPLE OF *IKKŌSHŪ* IN SASAKI!
ALONG WITH NODERA HONSHŌJI AND HARISAKI SHŌMANJI, IT IS ONE OF THREE KEY TEMPLES IN MIKAWA, AND THE VERY HUB OF *IKKŌSHŪ*.
IF IEYASU-*DONO* STARTS COLLECTING RICE THERE, WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN?

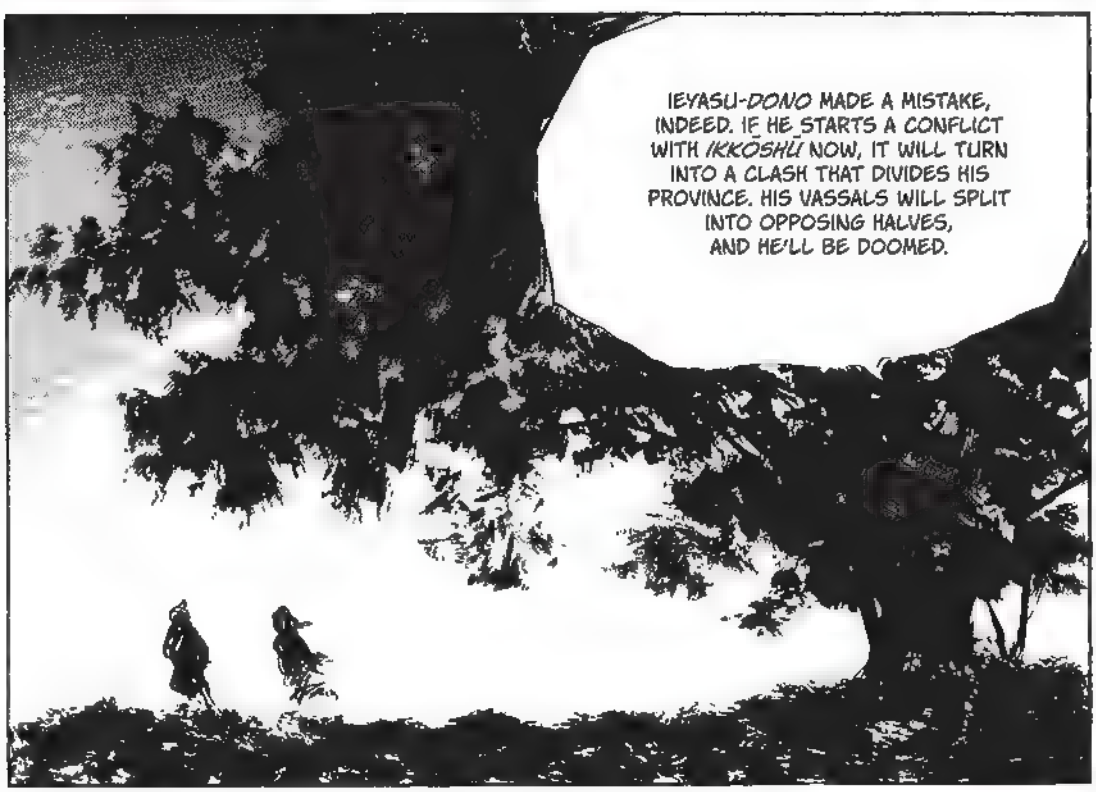
TELL THEM THIS IS MY FIRST VISIT SINCE I RETURNED TO MIKAWA.
TELL THEM I'M HERE AND THEY SHOULD ALL COME TO GREET ME.
YES SIR.

APPARENTLY, A MONK FROM NODERA HONSHŌJI NAMED KŪSEI HAS COME, AND EVERYONE IS AT JŌGŪJI TO LISTEN TO HIS SERMON.


IN ADDITION TO THE THREE KEY TEMPLES, THERE ARE NAKAGŌ JŌMYŌJI, HONGŌ SHŌBŌJI, HIRASAKA MURYŌJUJI, NAGASE GANSHŌJI, TORO HŌNSHUJI, AND MIDŌ ZENSHŪJI.

IN OTHER WORDS, MORE THAN HALF THE PROVINCE, INCLUDING HIS VASSALS, BELONG TO *IKKŌSHŪ*.
THE POWER BASE OF THE MATSUDAIRA CLAN, WHOM IEYASU-*DONO* LEADS, COINCIDES WITH THE ADHERENTS OF THESE TEMPLES.

WHAT SHOULD IEYASU-*DONO* HAVE DONE WHEN HE MARKED HIS FIRST STEP INTO MIKAWA?
HE SHOULD HAVE PACIFIED *IKKŌSHŪ* EVEN BEFORE HE MADE PEACE WITH NOBUNAGA. OR HE SHOULD'VE GIVEN UP *JŌDOSHŪ* AND CONVERTED TO *IKKŌSHŪ*.
HE SHOULD'VE DONE EITHER OF THE TWO. THAT WOULD'VE BEEN A SHORT CUT TO ESTABLISH A RICH AND POWERFUL BASE.


IEYASU-*DONO* MADE A MISTAKE, INDEED. IF HE STARTS A CONFLICT WITH *IKKŌSHŪ* NOW, IT WILL TURN INTO A CLASH THAT DIVIDES HIS PROVINCE. HIS VASSALS WILL SPLIT INTO OPPOSING HALVES, AND HE'LL BE DOOMED.

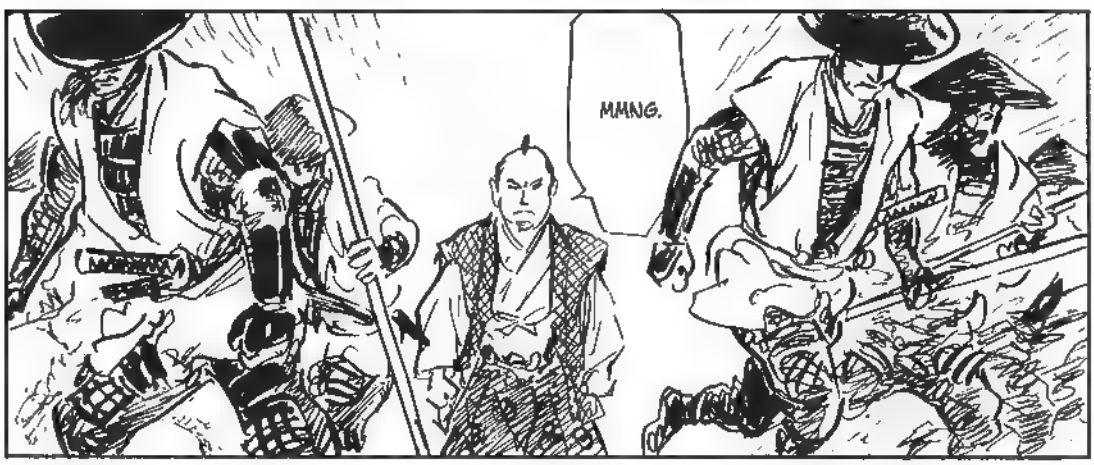
AND IF THAT HAPPENS, I WILL SNATCH UP MIKAWA'

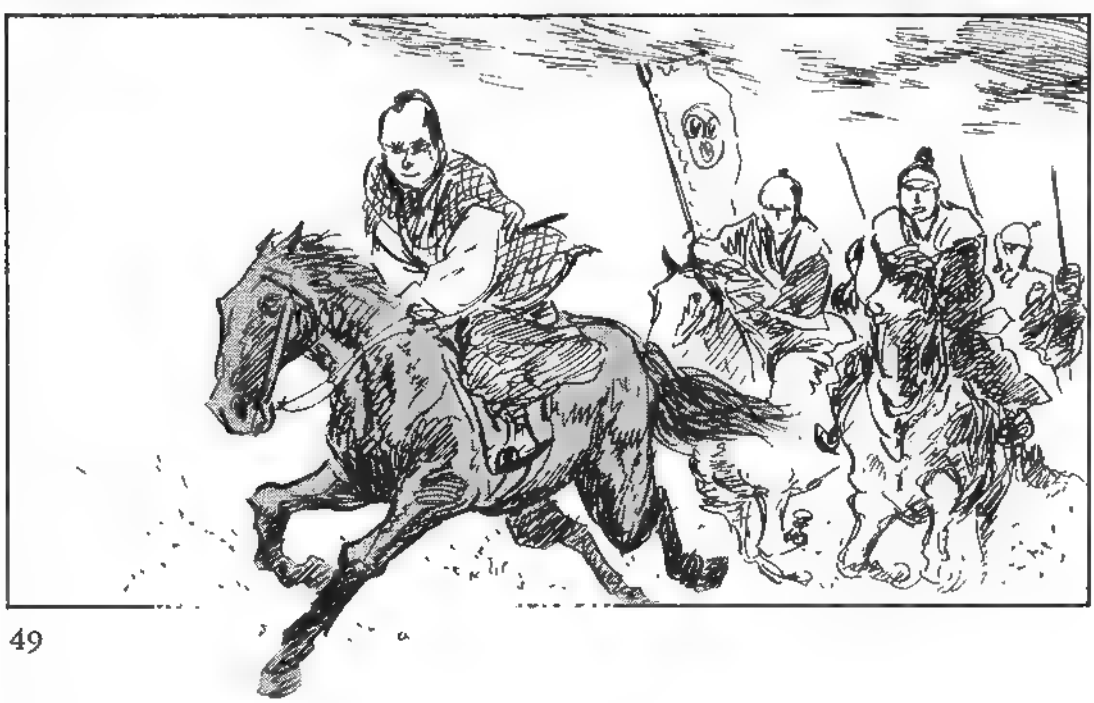
THEY WANT YOU TO COME TO JŌGŪJI.
IS THAT WHAT THE BONZE SAID?!
YES, MILORD.
WHAAT!
THEY'RE STILL HALFWAY THROUGH THE SERMON, AND CANNOT COME OUT TO SEE YOU.

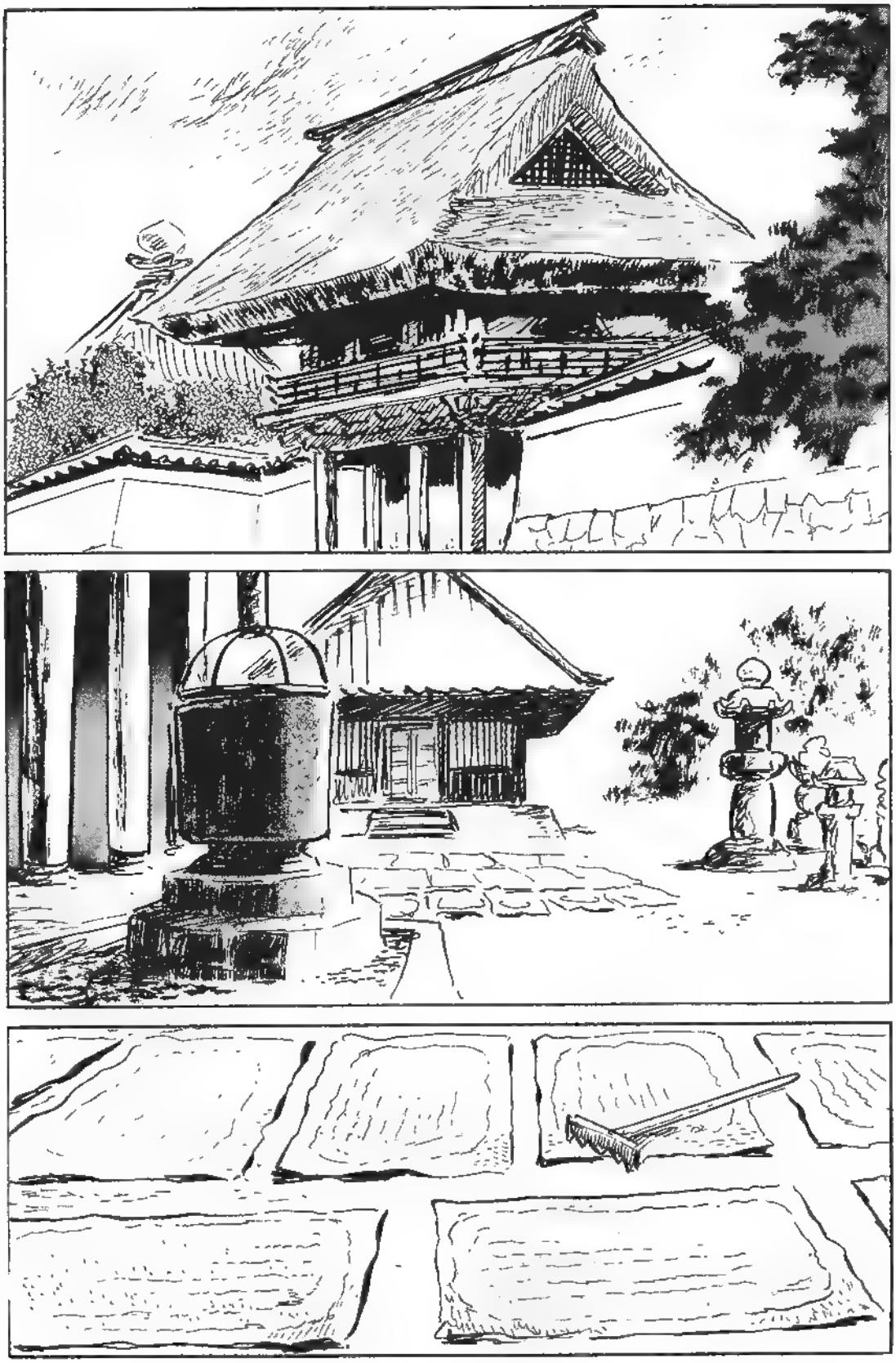
I WILL TEACH THEM!
THAT IS HARDLY WHAT TO SAY TO THEIR LORD!
IMBECILES!
KRHP!
KRHP!
KRHP!

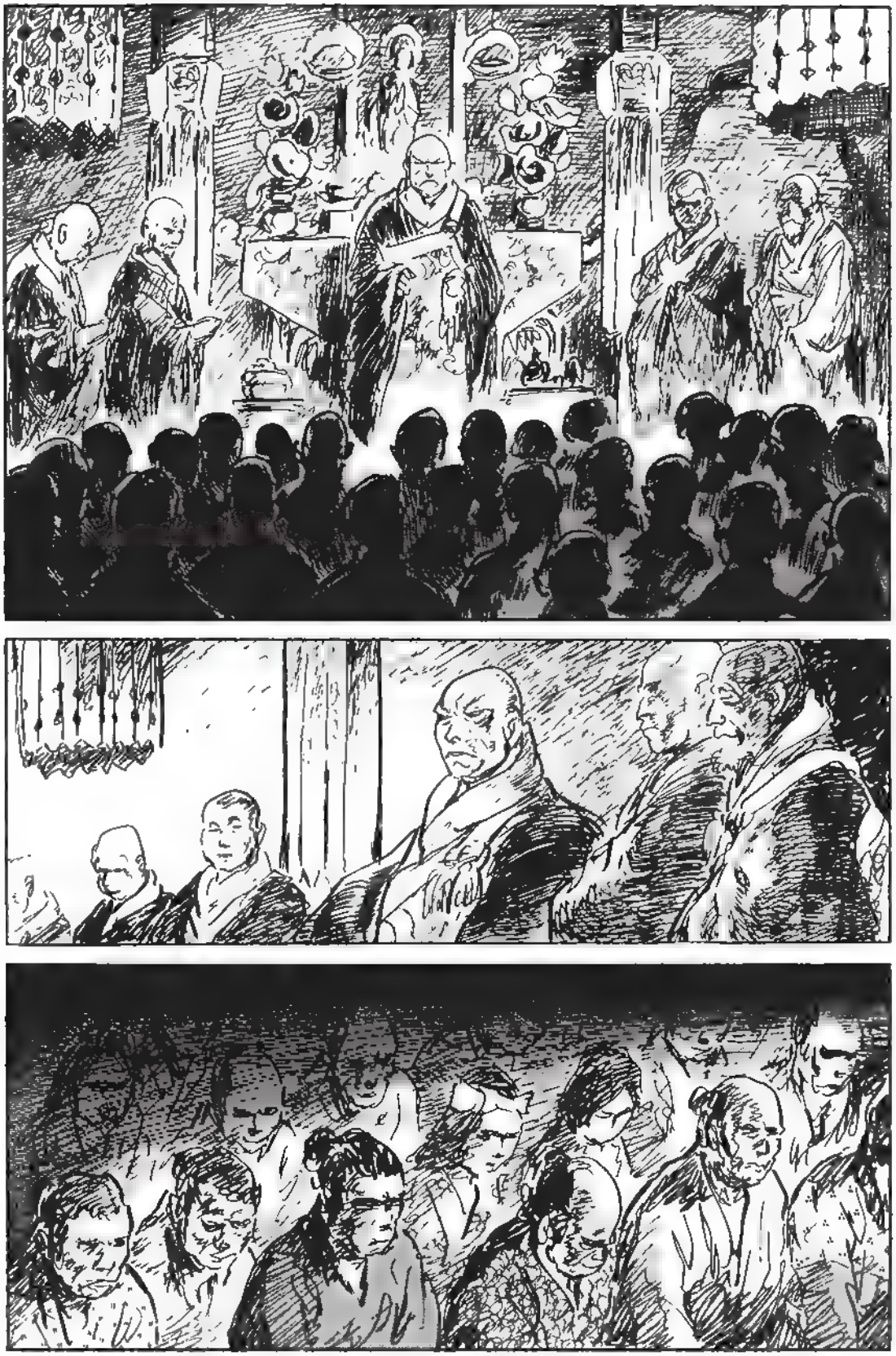
PLEASE DO NOT LOSE YOUR TEMPER!
M... MILORD!
KYAAA!
DROP!

IF THEY HAVE SIX SACKS, TAKE TWO. IF IT'S NOT HULLED, TAKE ONE. IF IT'S NOT HULLED BUT IS BEING DRIED, TAKE TWO. THAT'S THE RULE!
COLLECT RICE FROM EVERY HOUSE!

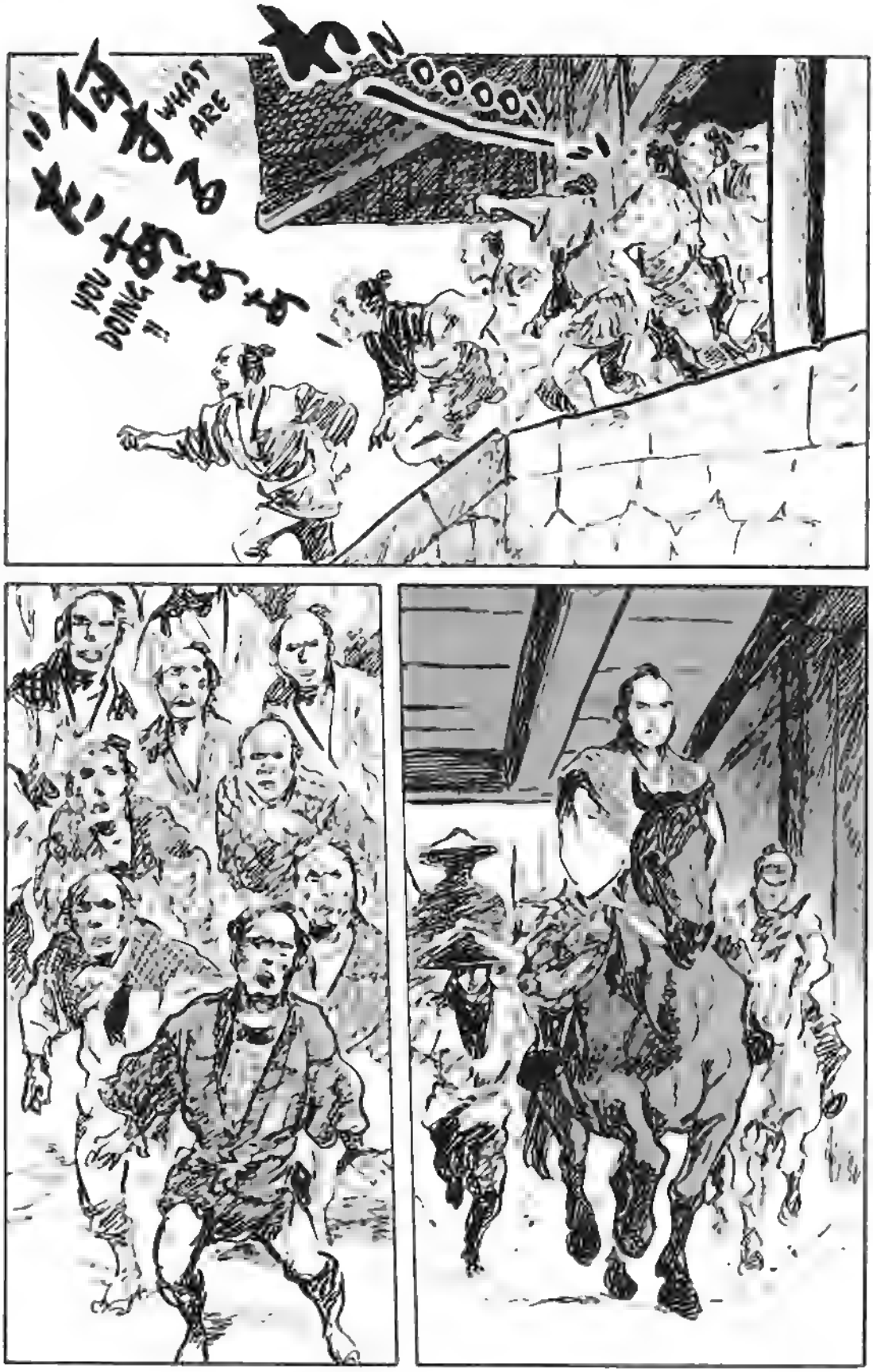

MMNG.

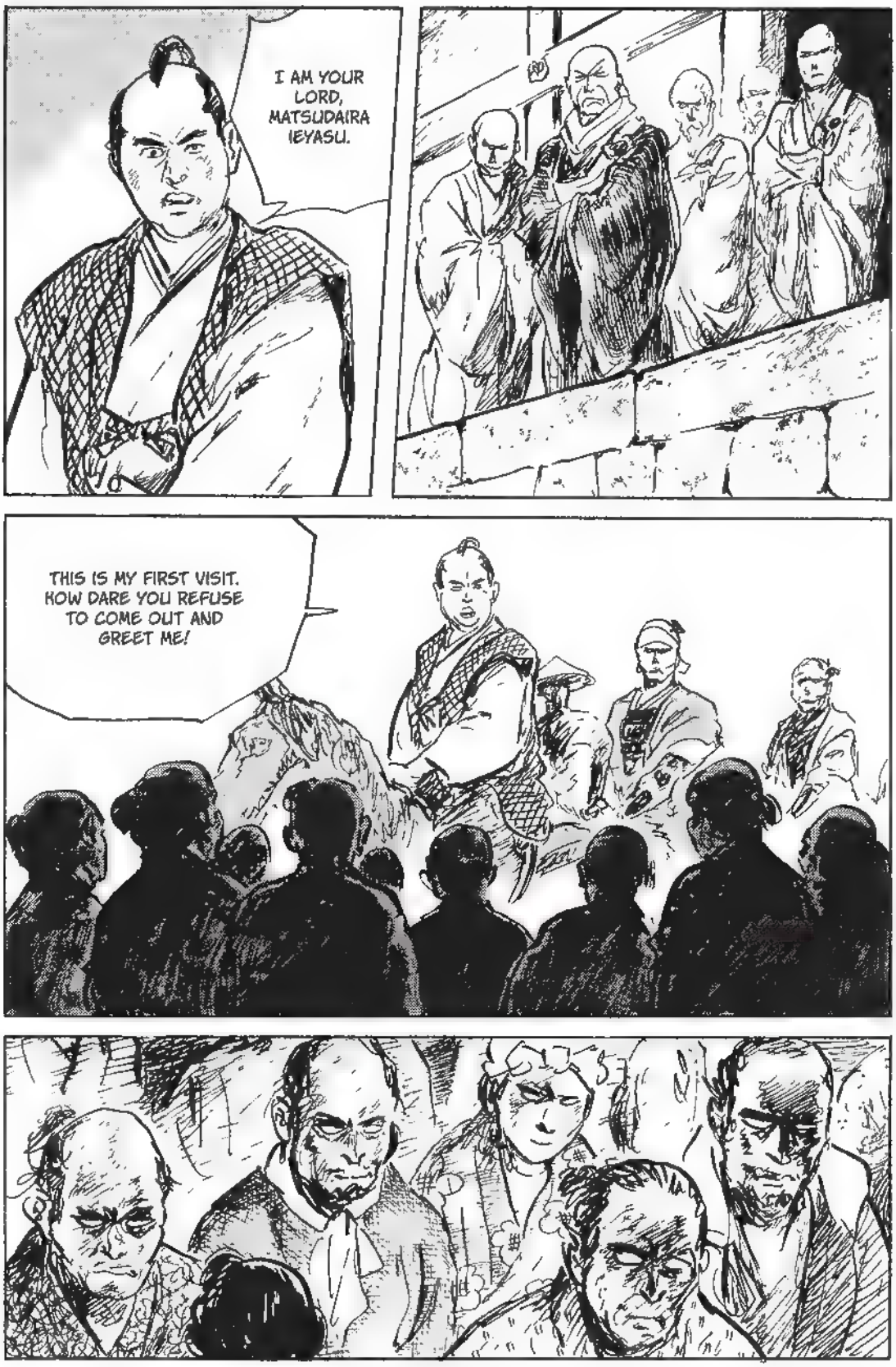


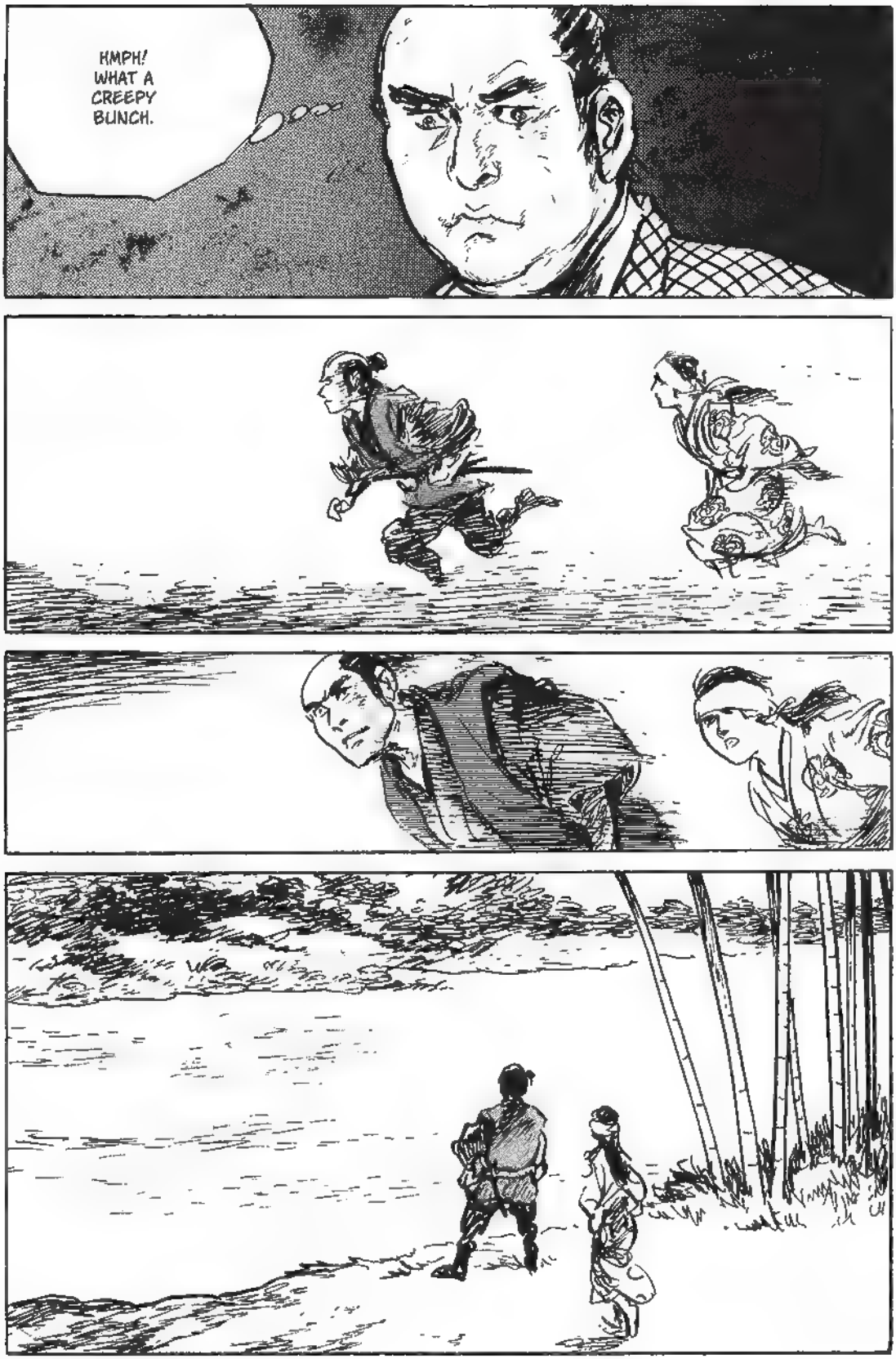


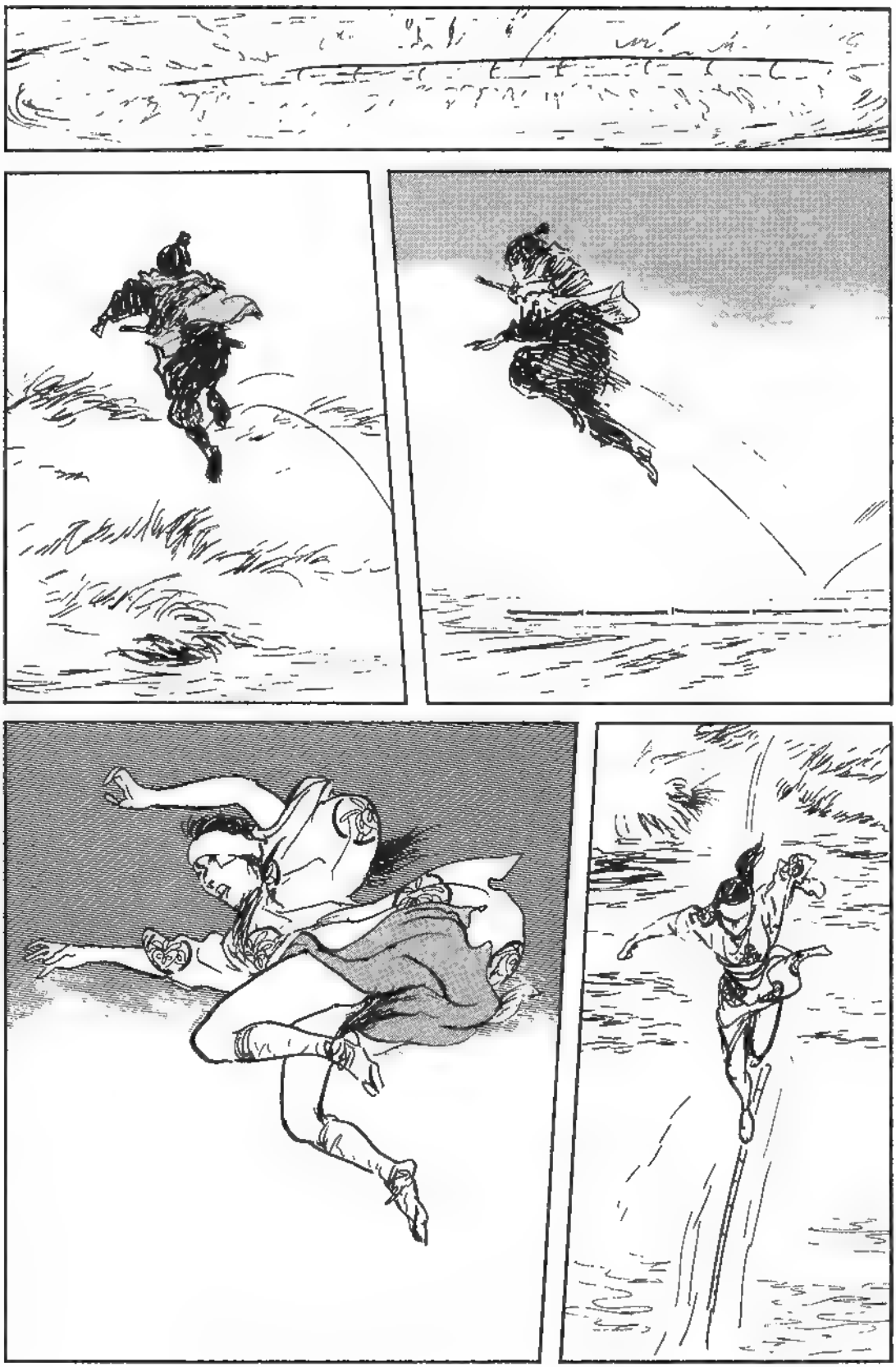


NOOOO!


NOOOO!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

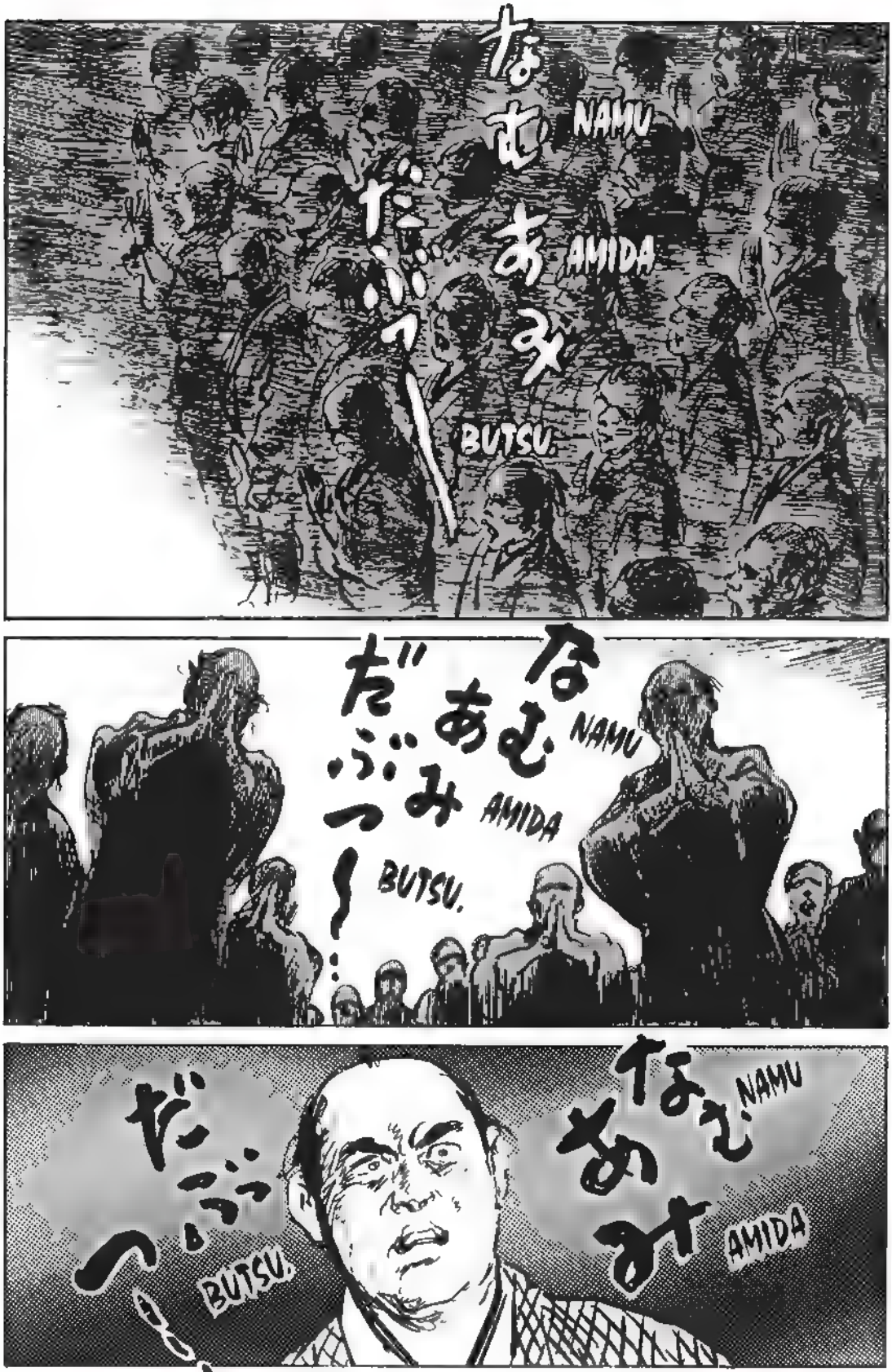

I AM YOUR LORD, MATSUDAIRA IEYASU.
THIS IS MY FIRST VISIT. HOW DARE YOU REFUSE TO COME OUT AND GREET ME!


HMPH! WHAT A CREEPY BUNCH.



MAKE SURE YOU DELIVER YOUR RICE IN THE RATIO I JUST DESCRIBED.
UNDER-STOOD?!

BUT YOU WON'T BE EXCUSED NEXT TIME!
I'VE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE, SO I WILL NOT QUESTION WHAT HAPPENED TODAY.

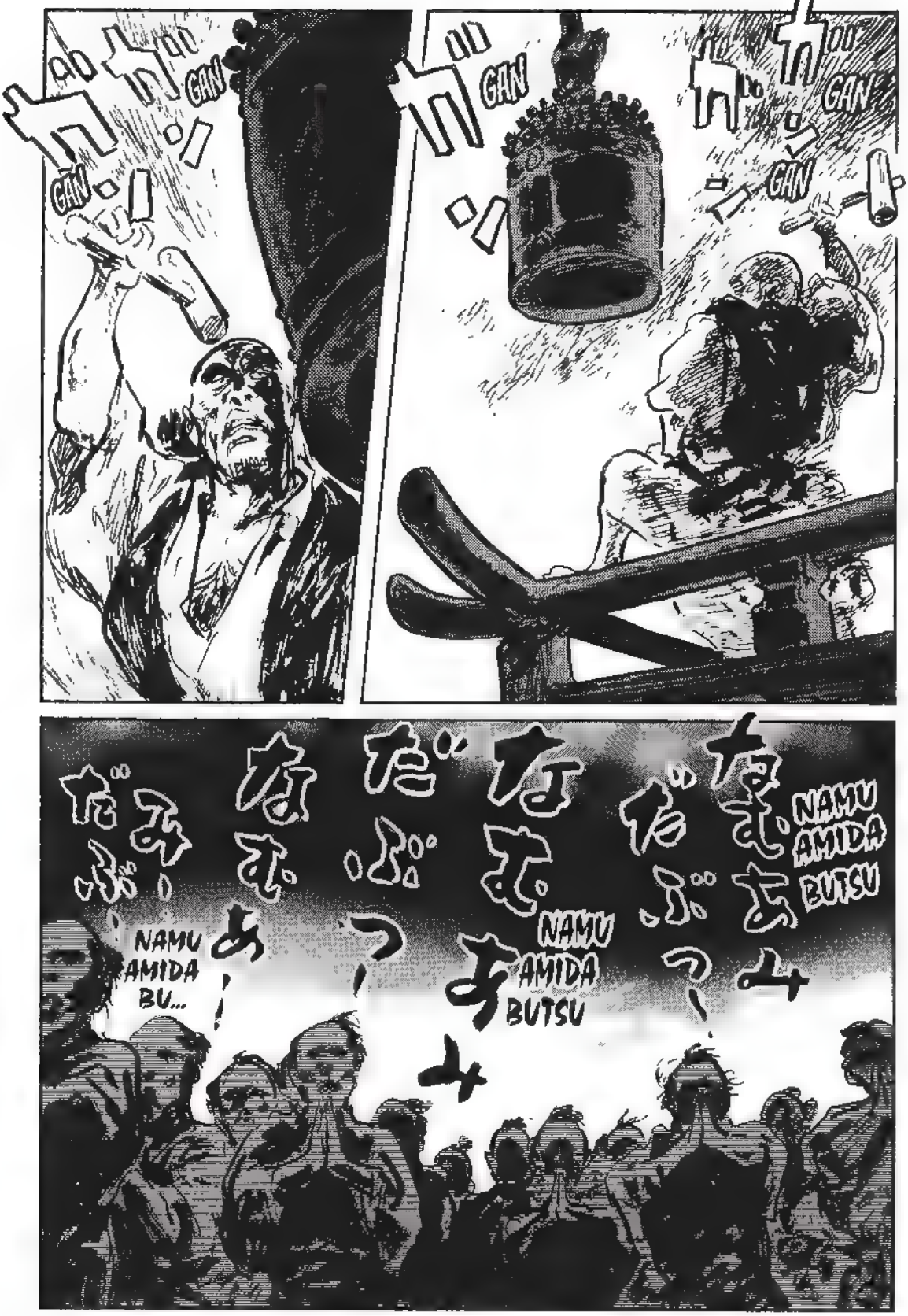

なむ NAMU
あみ AMIDA
だぶつ BUTSU
なむ NAMU
あみ AMIDA
だぶつ BUTSU.
なむ NAMU
あみ AMIDA
だぶつ BUTSU.

おんりえど ごうじょうど
ONRIEDO GONGUJODO.
ONRIEDO GONGUJODO.
ザッ
ザッ
ザッ
おんりえど ごうじょうど
ONRIEDO GONGUJODO.

ARE YOU JEERING AT YOUR LORD?!
BASTARDS!
DO YOU MEAN TO DRAW YOUR BLADES AGAINST YOUR MASTER?!
WHAT INSOLENCE!!
PEASANTS, THIS IS AN UNSPEAKABLE ACT! IT CANNOT BE IGNORED!

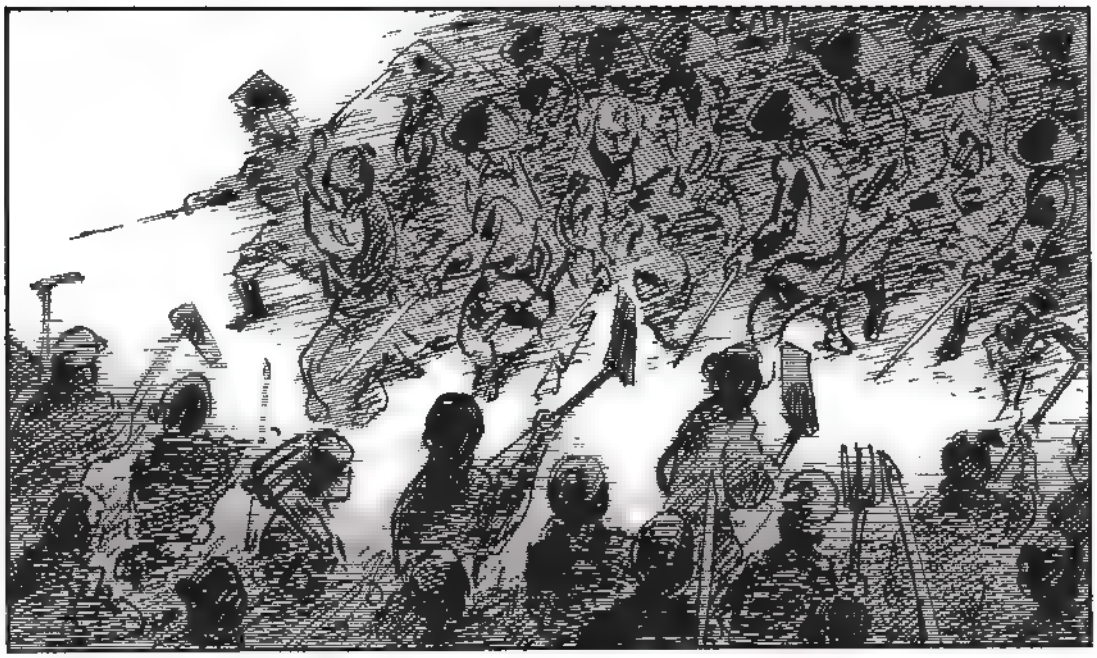
MATSUDAIRA IEYASU IS BUDDHA'S ENEMY. DESTROY HIM AND DEFEND THE TEACHINGS OF BUDDHA!
THE RELATIONSHIP WITH A FEUDAL LORD EXISTS MERELY IN THIS LIFE. WHAT'S ETERNAL IS YOUR CONNECTION WITH *AMIDA NYORAI*.
GHAN!
GHAN!

GAN
GAN
GAN
KAN
KAN
KAN
KAAN
KAAN
GAAN
GAAN
IT'S...
IT'S IKKŌSHŪ'S
KANSHŌ BELL.
OH NO!!
KAN
KAN
KAAN
KAAN
KAAN


GAN
GAN
GAN
GAN
なむあみだぶつ
なむあみだぶつ
なむあみだぶつ
なむあみだぶつ
NAMU AMIDA BUTSU
NAMU AMIDA BUTSU
NAMU AMIDA BU...

ごんぐじょうどおんりえど
GONGUJODO ONRIEDO.
ごんぐじょうどおんりえど
GONGUJODO ONRIEDO.
URRK...
MMNG...

NAMU
AMIDA
BUTSU
GAN
GAN
UNTIL YOU BUTCHER THEM ALL, YOU MUST NOT MOVE BACK EVEN ONE STEP!
KILL 'EM!
ATTACK!!

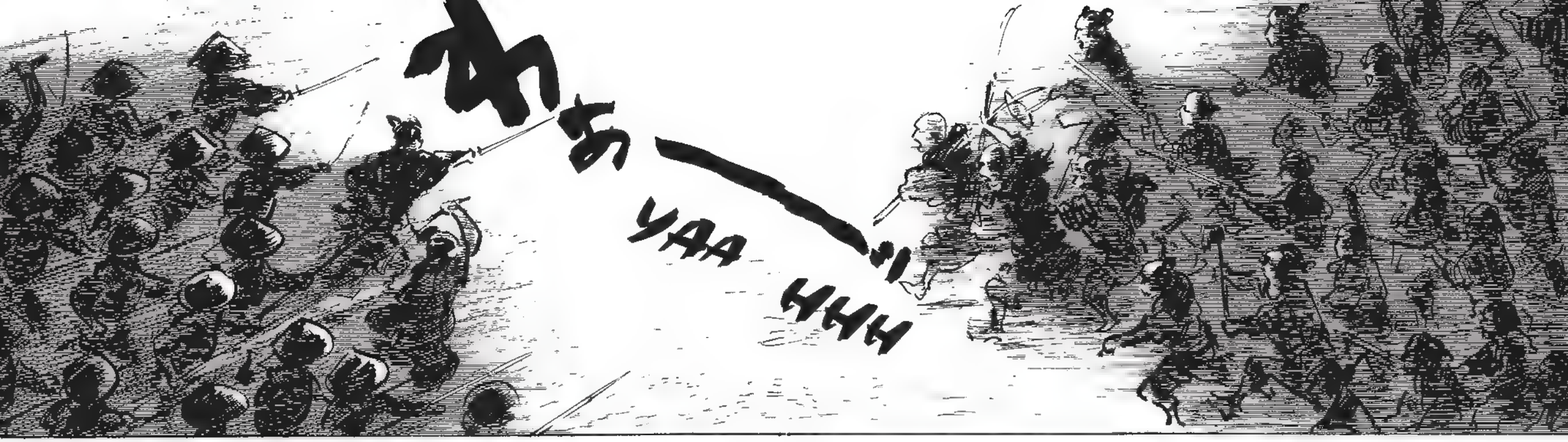


TO ALLOW AN OUTRAGE LIKE THIS IS A DISGRACE TO OUR SECT!

THIS TEMPLE IS A SANCTUARY OF SPIRITS WHERE EVEN THE SHUGO ARE FORBIDDEN FROM ENTERING, SINCE THE TIME OF SHINRAN SHŌNIN, OUR FOUNDER!
WHAT CAN A MERE FEUDAL LORD DO?!

YAHH!!
OHHH
EVERYONE, PUNISH MATSUDAIRA IEYASU, THE BUDDHA'S ENEMY!
HHH
STOMP
STOMP
WAHHHH

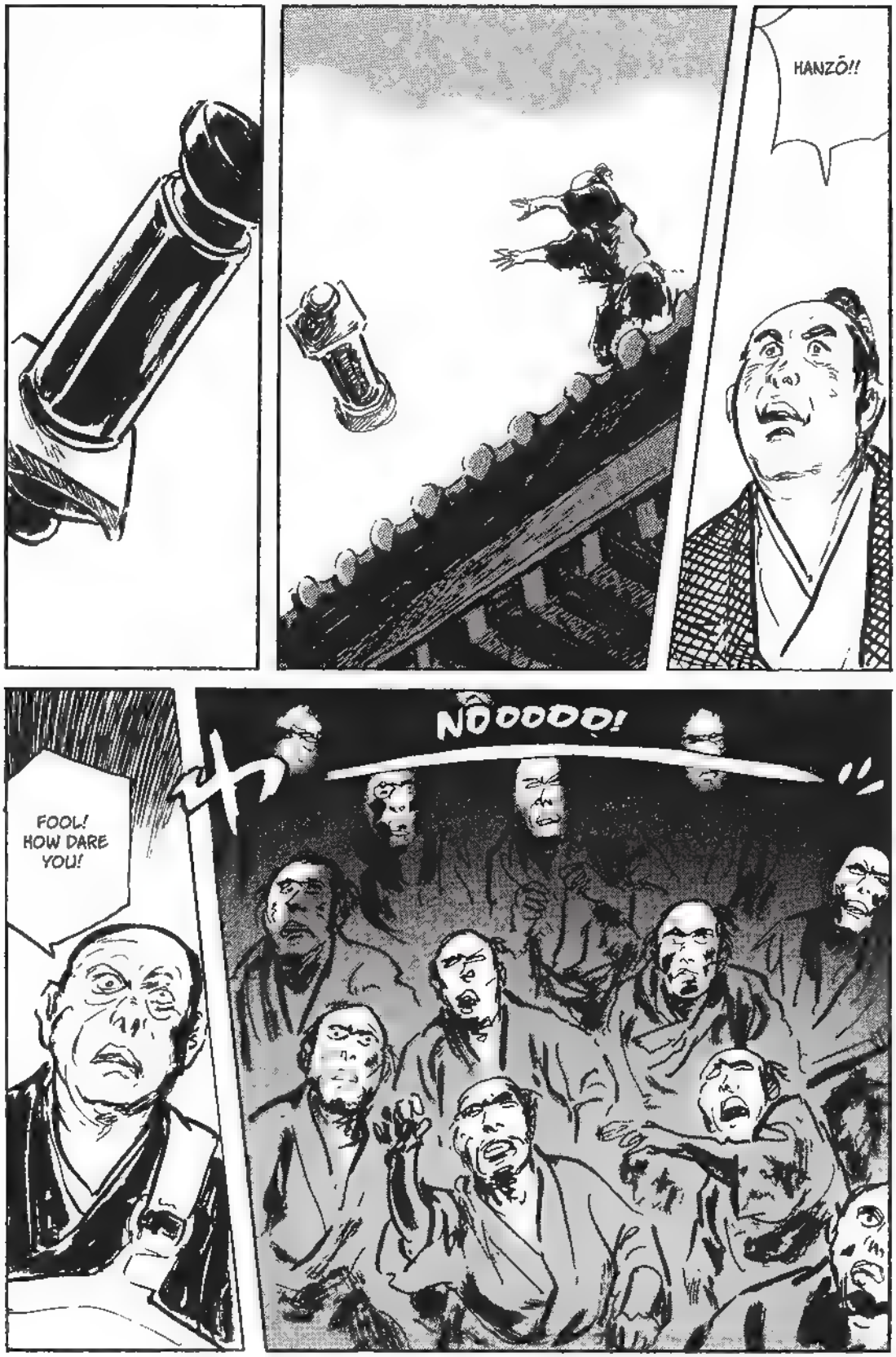
KILL! SLAUGHTER 'EM ALL!
URRGH!


AAAA

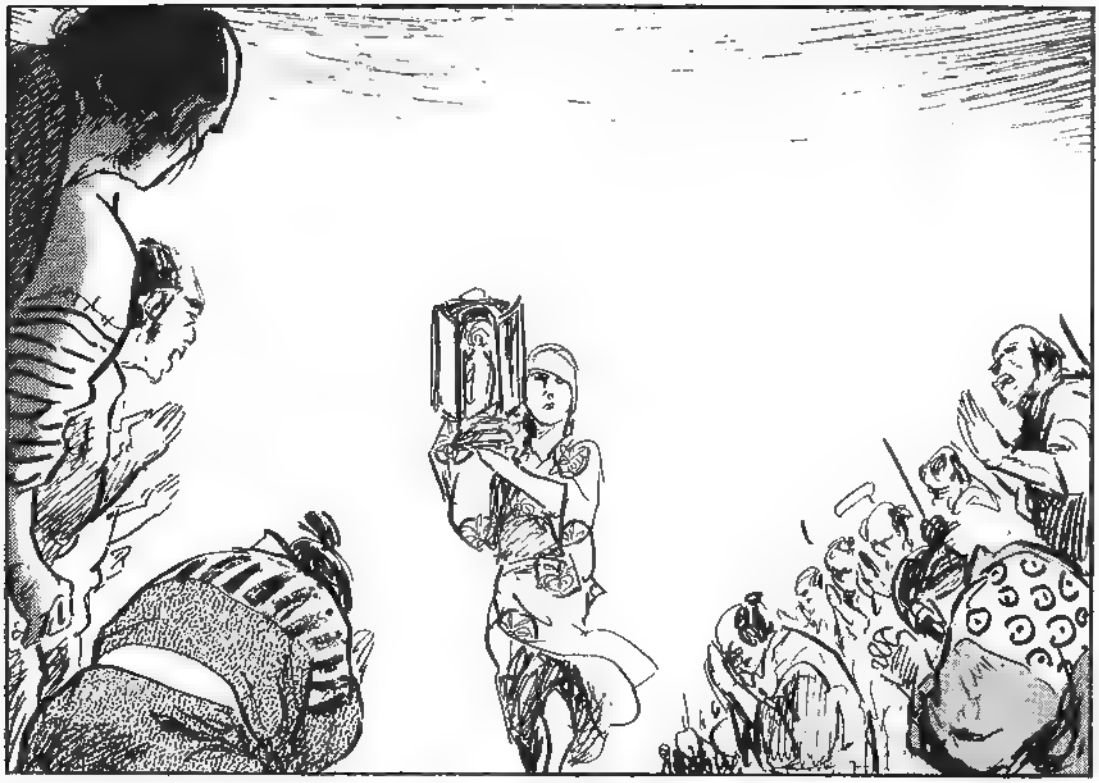
IT'S... TOO LATE!
WAHHH!
WAHHH!
WAHHH!
BACK! PULL BACK!!
MMNG...
M... MILORD! THEY'RE IMPOSSIBLE TO BEAT. LET'S BACK OUT FOR NOW!

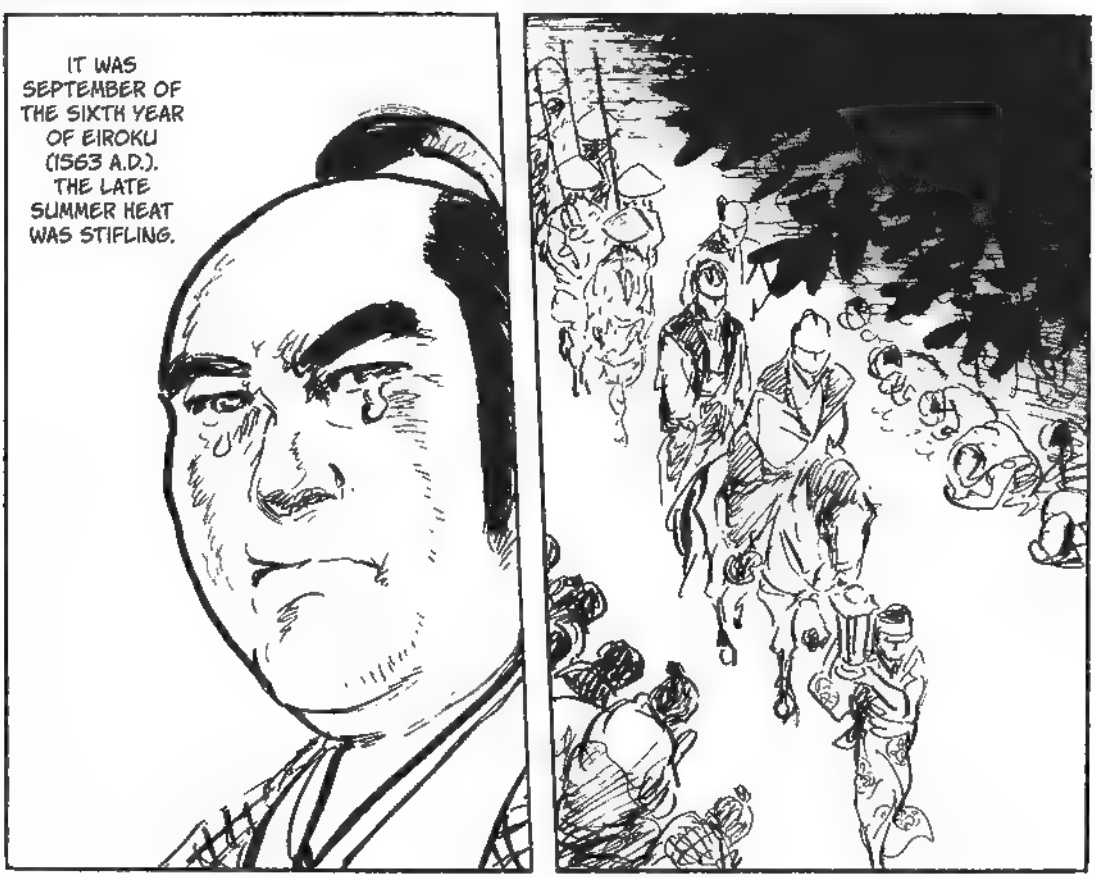
WE'LL CUT THROUGH AND RUN STRAIGHT TO SASAKI!
ENCIRCLE OUR LORD!
GOD! PEASANTS FROM NEARBY ARE REINFORCING THEM!

TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT THIS!
ALL OF YOU!

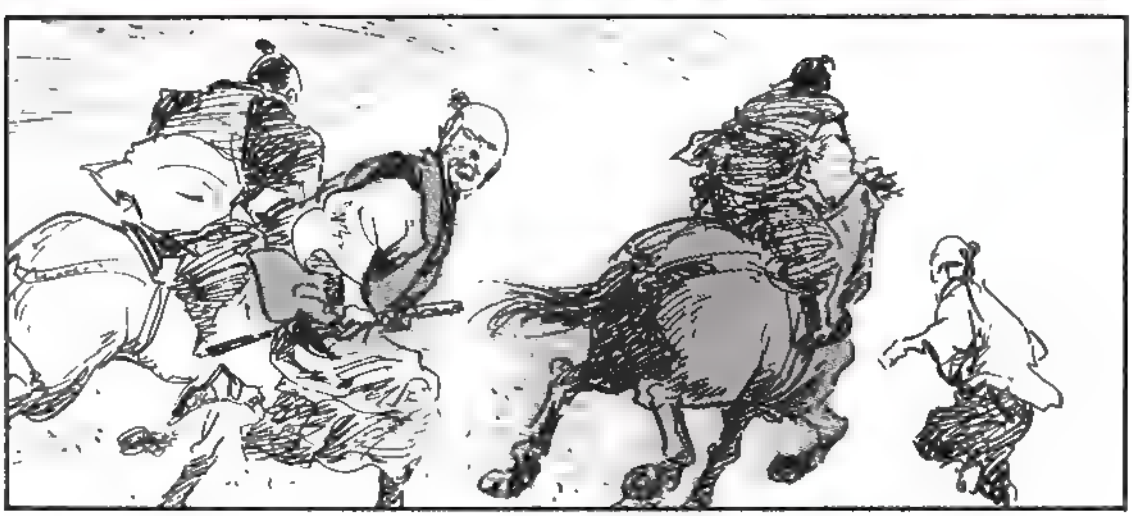

HANZŌ!!
NOOOOO!
FOOL! HOW DARE YOU!

おお
ohhhh
HANZŌ!!
MILORD!
PLEASE, MILORD!




IT WAS SEPTEMBER OF THE SIXTH YEAR OF EIROKU (1563 A.D.). THE LATE SUMMER HEAT WAS STIFLING.

LISTEN! IF YOU COME AFTER US, THIS BUDDHA WILL BE SMASHED TO PIECES!!



GO!
GET OUR
BUDDHA BACK!!

GUK ドゴ

ドス CHOK

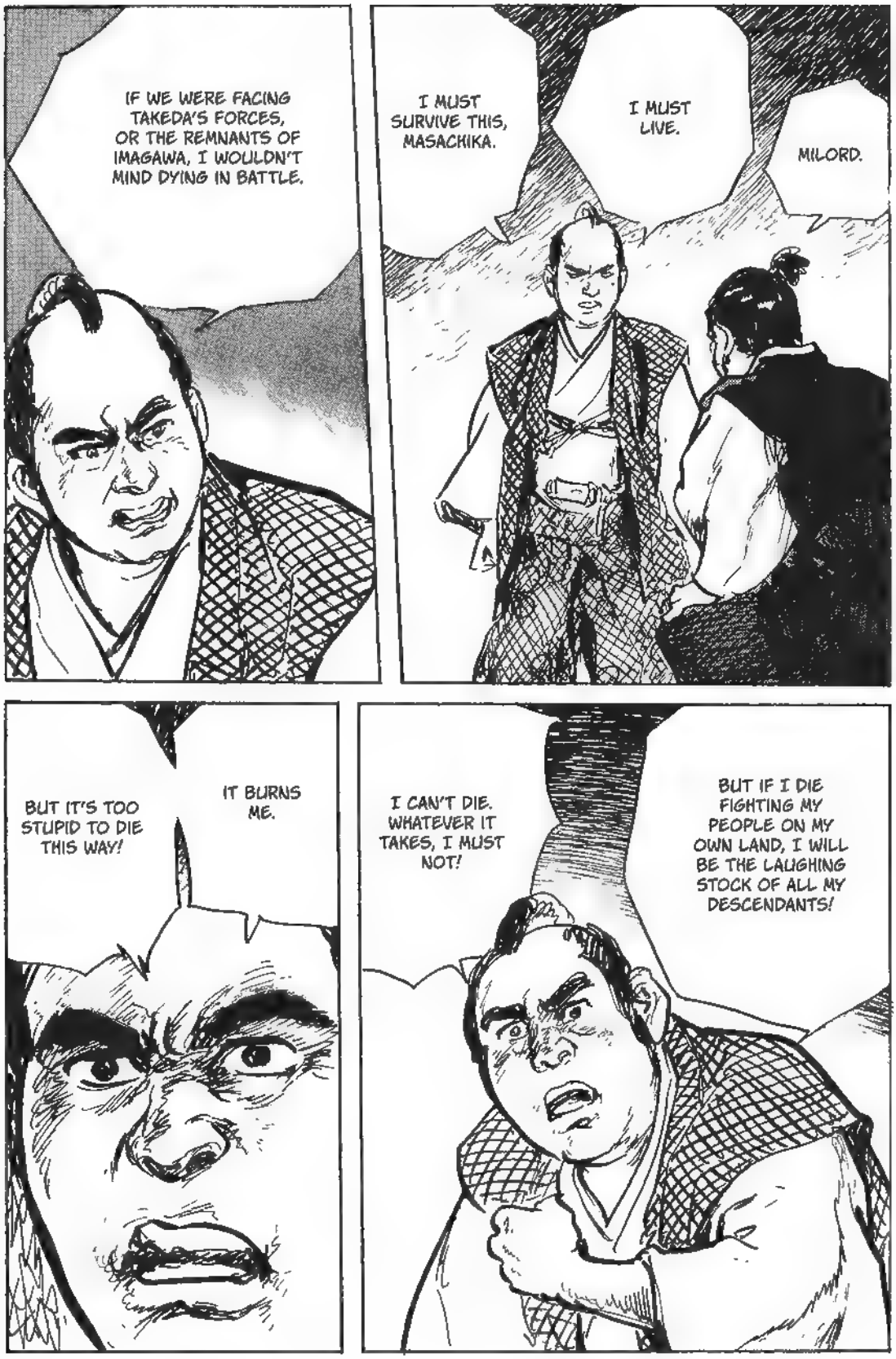
ドス THOK

PAKA
PAKA
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
MILORD! DO NOT GO TO THE FORT OF SASAKI. INSTEAD, PLEASE RETURN TO OKAZAKI.

YOU MUST NOT! YOUR LIFE IS IN DANGER!
THE WAY IT IS NOW, THE PEASANTS WILL INCREASE IN NUMBER TO TENS OF THOUSANDS.
I'LL TAKE THE MEN FROM SASAKI AND DECIMATE THOSE PEASANTS! AND THE BONZE TOO!
HOW CAN I BACK OUT LIKE A COWARD?!
IT'S EVEN MORE DANGEROUS TO TRY TO MAKE IT TO OKAZAKI.
THEY'LL RELY ON THEIR NUMBERS AND SURROUND THE FORT, AND KNOCK IT DOWN. YOUR HUNDRED OR TWO WON'T LAST EVEN A COUPLE DAYS.

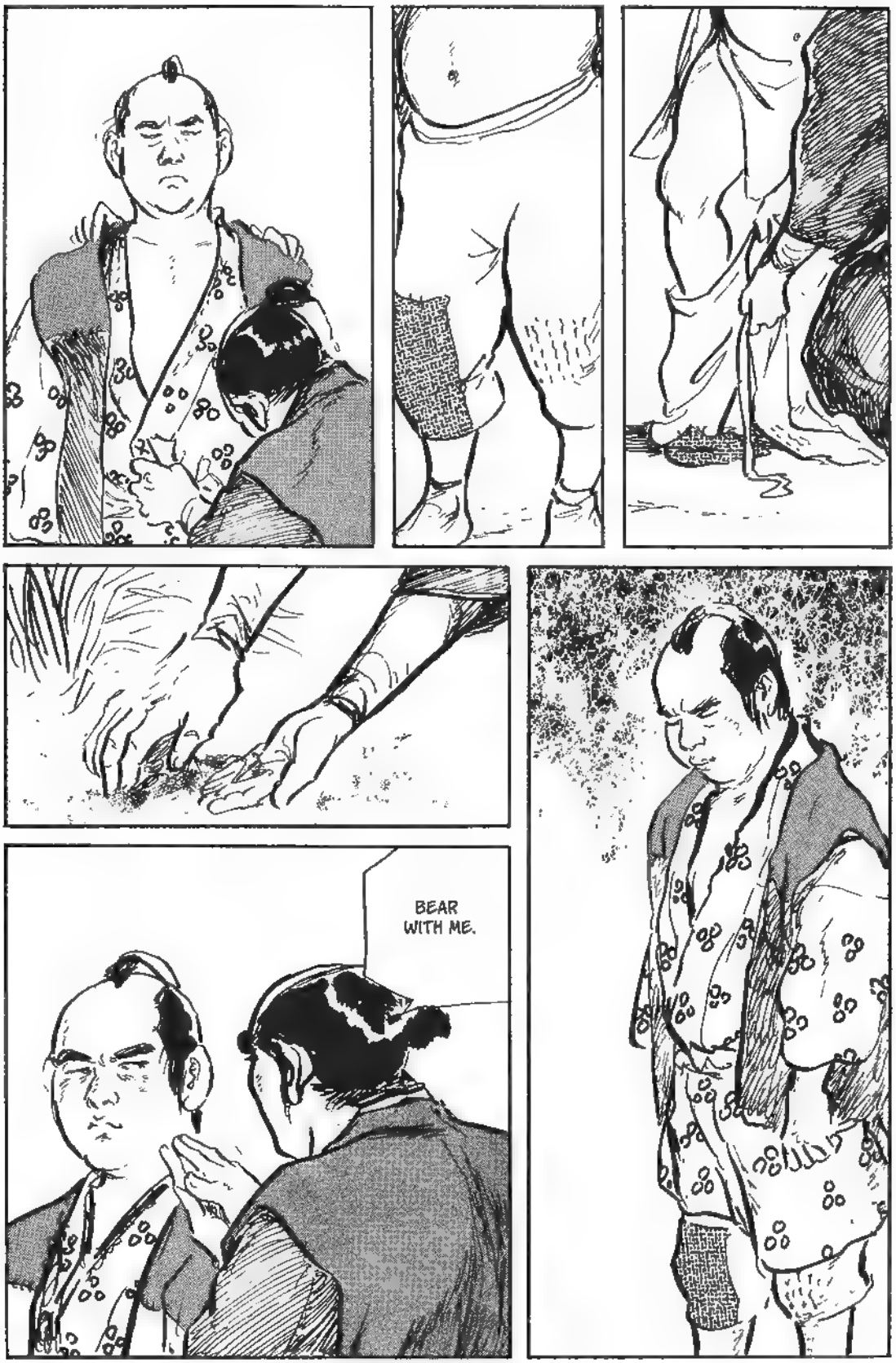
SAKAI-SAMA, MY WIFE AND I WILL PROTECT MILORD AND TAKE HIM TO OKAZAKI IN SAFETY. WITH THE TECHNIQUE OF SHINOBI, IT'S EASY ENOUGH TO SLIP THROUGH PEASANTS.
HOW CAN YOU MAKE IT TO OKAZAKI NOW?
I BET ALL THE ROADS ARE BLOCKED, AND THE PEASANTS MUST BE SPREADING LIKE WEEDS EVERYWHERE!
IF YOU CAN RESIST FOR TWO DAYS, I WILL HAVE MY FATHER, JŌKANNYŪDŌ, BRING HIS MEN FROM IGA...
MEANWHILE, SAKAI-SAMA, PLEASE RUN STRAIGHT TO SASAKI AND DECEIVE THEM BY MAKING IT LOOK AS IF MILORD IS HOLDING THE FORT.
...AND RESCUE YOU IN THE DARK OF THE NIGHT.

PLEASE DECIDE!
MILORD!
ドバ
SUMP SUMP
ドバ


IF WE WERE FACING TAKEDA'S FORCES, OR THE REMNANTS OF IMAGAWA, I WOULDN'T MIND DYING IN BATTLE.
I MUST SURVIVE THIS, MASACHIKA.
I MUST LIVE.
MILORD.
BUT IT'S TOO STUPID TO DIE THIS WAY!
IT BURNS ME.
I CAN'T DIE. WHATEVER IT TAKES, I MUST NOT!
BUT IF I DIE FIGHTING MY PEOPLE ON MY OWN LAND, I WILL BE THE LAUGHING STOCK OF ALL MY DESCENDANTS!

MILORD IS IN YOUR HAND, HANZŌ!
IMMEDIATELY AFTER I'VE RETURNED TO OKAZAKI, I WILL CALL EVERYONE TO ARMS AND ANNIHILATE THE MAGGOTS OF IKKŌSHŪ.
GO, MASACHIKA!
BE SAFE.
HURRY!!
KRMPT KRMPT KRMPT

PLEASE, MILORD.

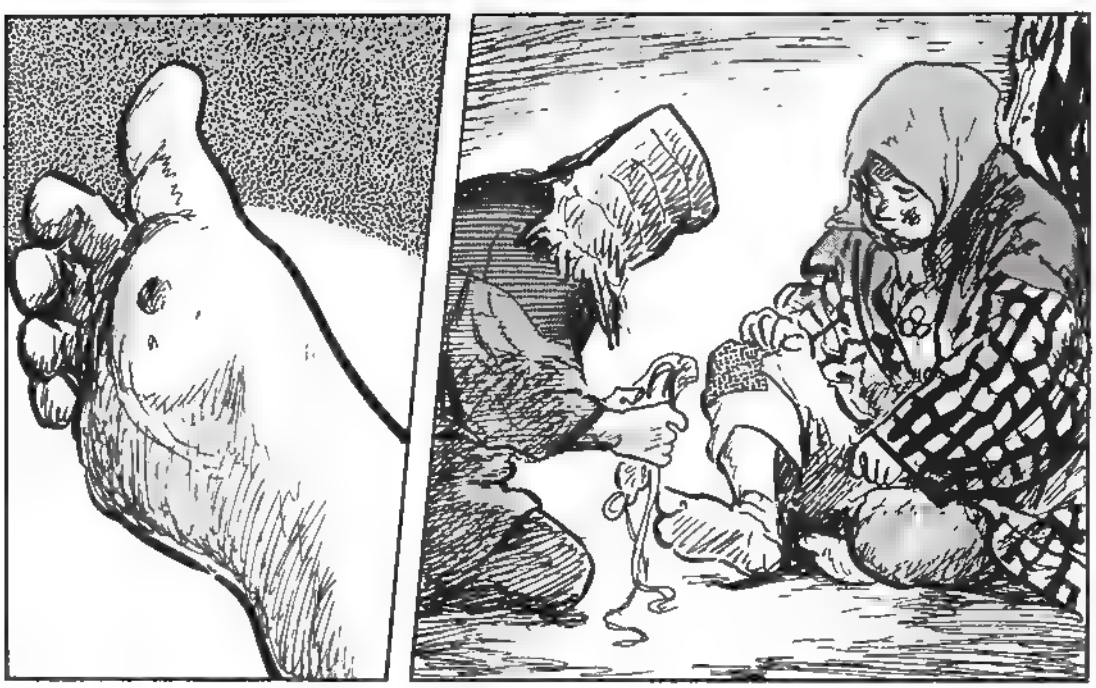

BEAR
WITH ME.

PLEASE OPEN YOUR MOUTH AND SHOW ME YOUR TEETH.

THIS WAY, YOU SHALL BE ABLE TO GO BACK TO OKAZAKI UNHARMED. THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE.

THAT'S JUST HOW I FEEL RIGHT NOW.
IT'S LIKE PLACING MY OWN STRAW SANDAL ON MY HEAD.

IEYASU WAS TWENTY-TWO YEARS OLD AT THE TIME.
HOW WRETCHED!



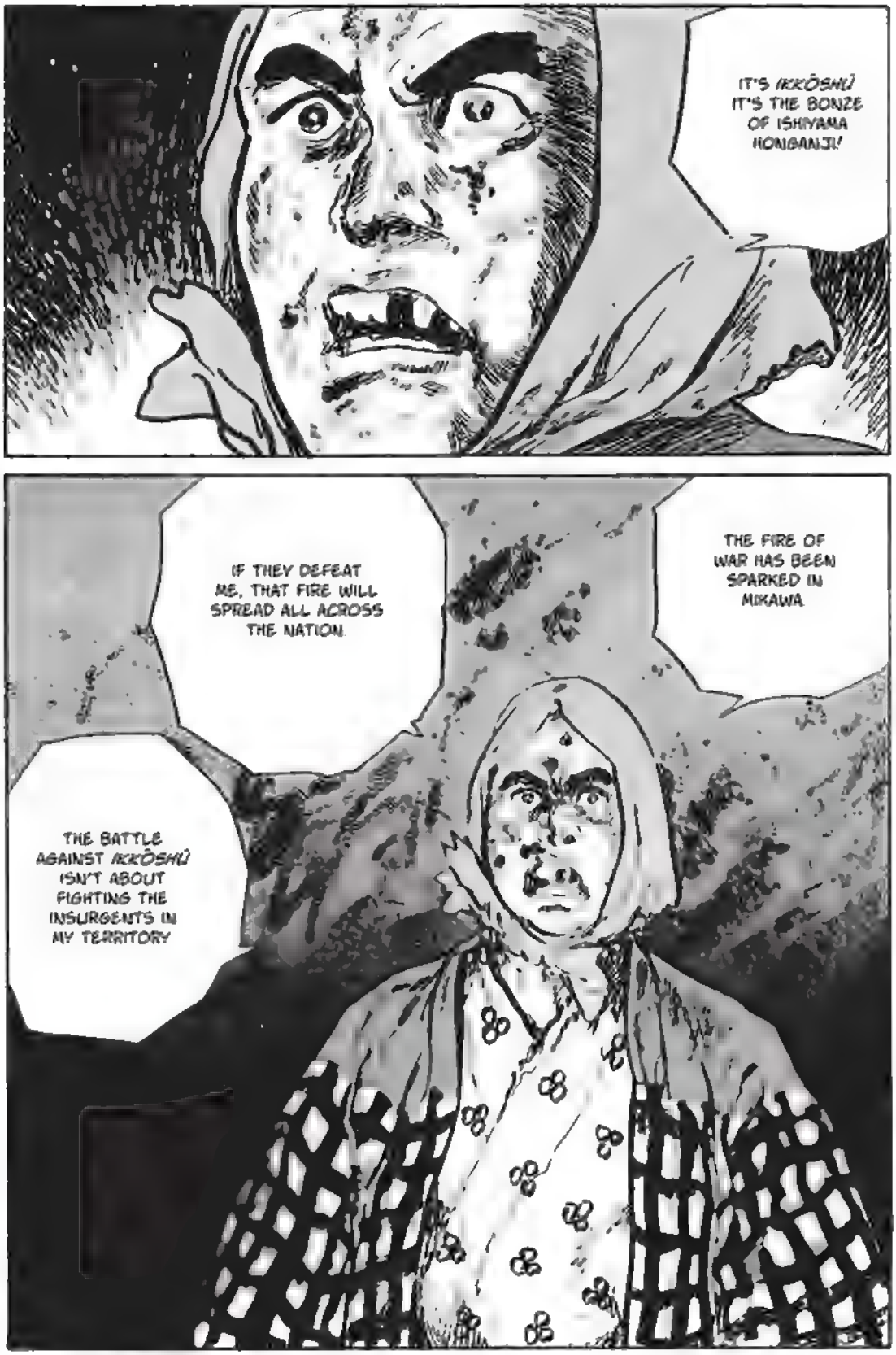
AW!
YES.
HANZŌ.
URK!

DO YOU THINK WE CAN BEAT THEM?
ER... WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF IKKŌSHŪ?
HM.
WHETHER WE CAN OR NOT, EITHER WAY, THEY'RE TROUBLESOME.
BUT...
IF THEY WERE JUST MONKS AND PEASANTS, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO CRUSH THEM ALL AT ONCE...

BESIDES THAT, THE TOGASHI CLAN, THE *SHUGO* OF KAGA, FELL. THE POWER OF ISHIYAMA HONGANJI DOMINATES OVER ASANO. AND THE TEN TEMPLES IN KITAŌMI ARE STRONGER THAN A LORD OF A CASTLE.
SINCE THEY BELONG TO THE SAME SECT, IT'S MOST LIKELY.
I BET YOU SUSPECT NEARLY HALF OF MY VASSALS WILL BETRAY ME, JOIN THE REBELS AND FIGHT, DON'T YOU?
AND THAT MEANS, EVEN IF YOU WIN THE BATTLE, YOU WILL LOSE HALF YOUR VASSALS AND A GREAT MANY PEASANTS. I THINK, IN REALITY, IT'S NO DIFFERENT FROM DEFEAT...
IT'S BACKED BY THEIR ABILITY TO UNITE THE POWER OF THE *SAMURAI* WHO BELONG TO THEIR SECT.
I MUST NOT WIN... AND YET, I MUST NOT LOSE EITHER... HUH?
...GREEN.
I AM STILL...

ENRAGED...
...I LOST MY TEMPER AND FORGOT MYSELF. FEELING SO WRETCHED, I SHED TEARS... AND THEN I WAS OVERTAKEN BY SORROW.
IN THIS TIME OF WARRING STATES, I AM STILL AN INFANT.
BECAUSE NOW I REMEMBER THAT MORE THAN HALF OF MY VASSALS HAVE CONVERTED TO *IKKŌSHŪ*.
BUT NOW, CLOAKED LIKE A PEASANT AND HAVING TRAVELED THIS FAR, I AM TERRIFIED.
AND PROBABLY MOST OF THEM WILL TURN AGAINST ME...

THE FOLLOWERS OF NAKAGŌ JŌMYŌJI AND HARISAKI SHŌMANJI MUST BE HEADING FOR SASAKI.
I SEE SEVERAL HUNDREDS ON THE OPPOSITE BANK!
I THOUGHT IT WAS EITHER KIPPŌSHI-*DONO* OR THE TIGER OF KAI WHO WOULD SEIZE CONTROL. BUT I WAS WRONG.
I FEEL STRANGELY CALM RIGHT NOW. IT'S UNBELIEVABLE THAT I PANICKED EARLIER.

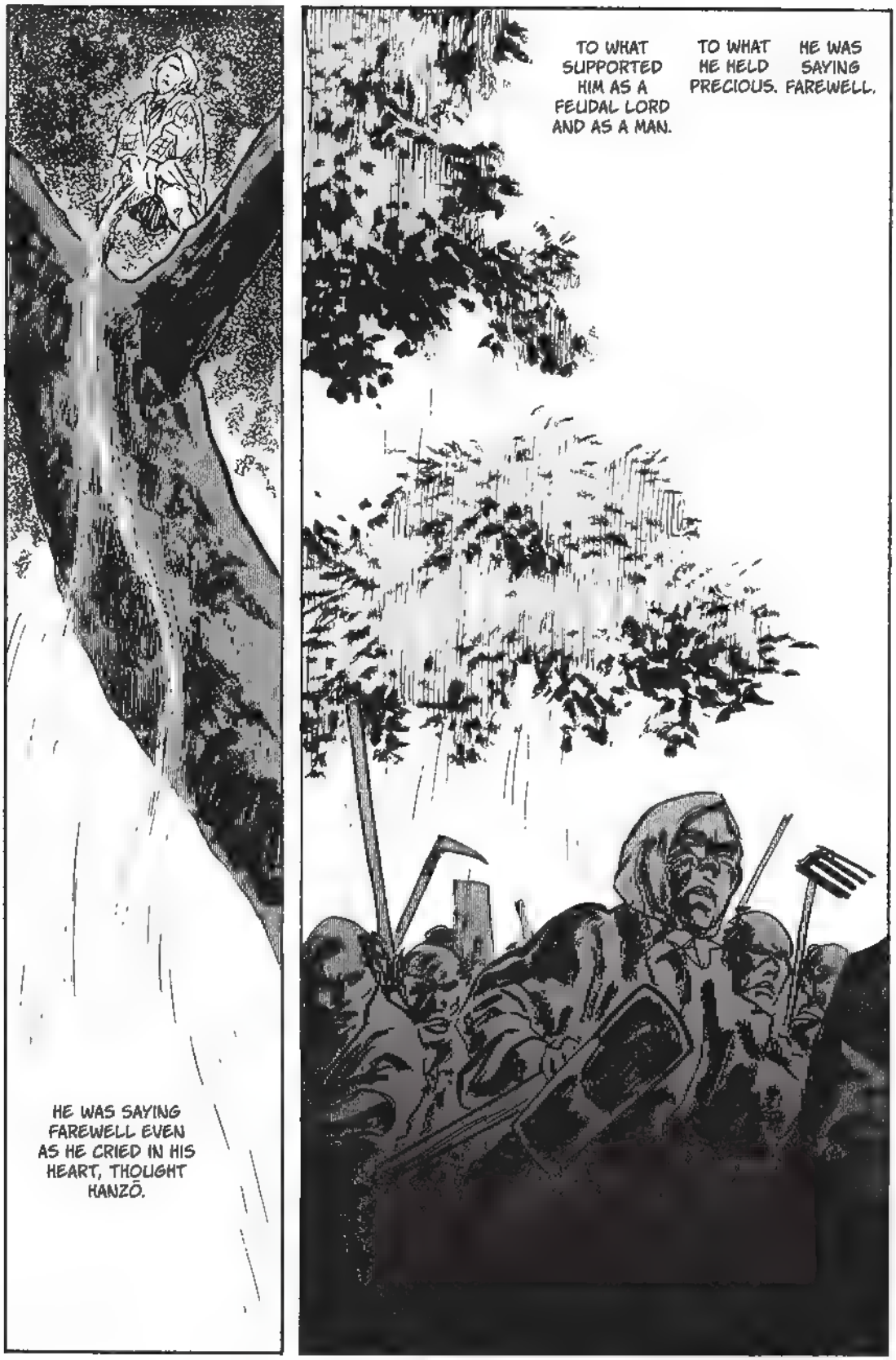

IT'S IKKÔSHÛ! IT'S THE BONZE OF ISHIYAMA HONGANJI!
IF THEY DEFEAT ME, THAT FIRE WILL SPREAD ALL ACROSS THE NATION
THE FIRE OF WAR HAS BEEN SPARKED IN MIKAWA
THE BATTLE AGAINST IKKÔSHÛ ISN'T ABOUT FIGHTING THE INSURGENTS IN MY TERRITORY

WILL SAMURAI PERISH AND LET THE MONKS TAKE OVER THE COUNTRY? IT'S OUR FIRST TEST!
THIS IS A COLOSSAL BATTLE WITH THE FUTURE OF EVERY SAMURAI AT STAKE!
WHAT A PERFECT CAUSE ON WHICH TO STAKE MY NECK! I WILL FIGHT LIKE HELL, HANZŌ!

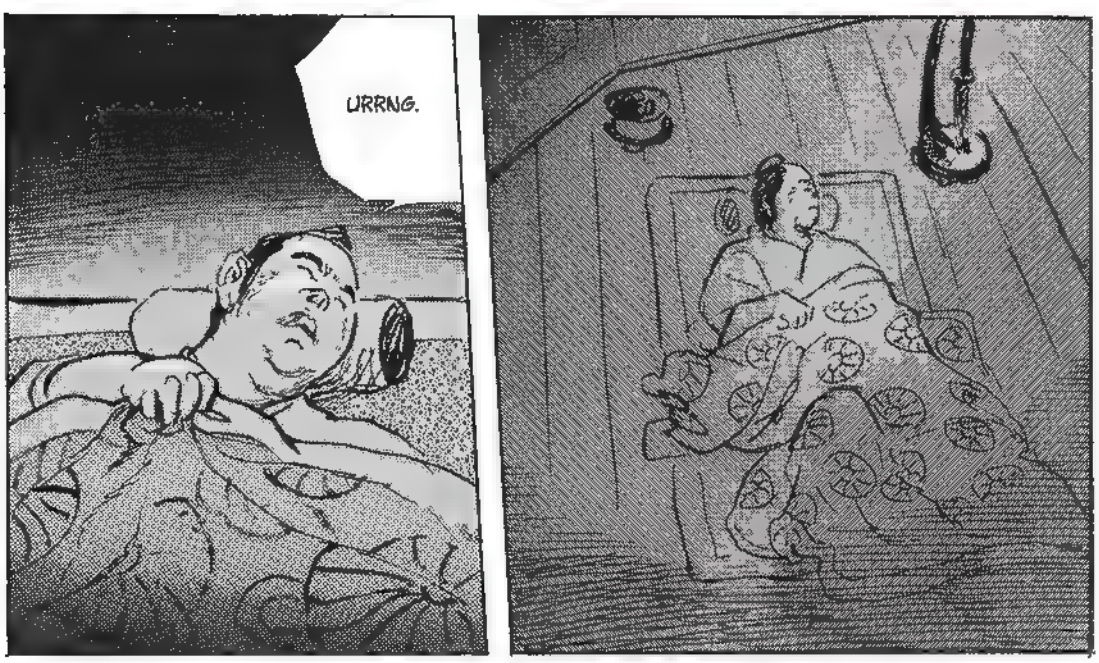
IF WE DON'T PULL OUT THESE POISONOUS ROOTS NOW, THE ERA OF *SAMURAI* WILL COME TO AN END.
MIKAWA *SAMURAI* ARE FAMOUS FOR THEIR UNPARALLELED LOYALTY. AND YET, THE SECT IS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO MAKE HALF OF THEM BETRAY THEIR MASTER!!
THEY'RE CROSSING THE RIVER.
EVEN IF I LOSE MY VASSALS AND PEASANTS, AND EVEN IF MY PROVINCE IS NO LONGER AN INDEPENDENT STATE AFTER THIS, I MUST FIGHT!!

WELL, LET ME GIVE A SAMURAI'S FERTILIZER TO THOSE PEASANTS WHO AREN'T MAKING RICE

ドゥ
STMP
トゥ
STMP
ドゥ
STMP


TO WHAT SUPPORTED HIM AS A FEUDAL LORD AND AS A MAN.
TO WHAT HE HELD PRECIOUS.
HE WAS SAYING FAREWELL.
HE WAS SAYING FAREWELL EVEN AS HE CRIED IN HIS HEART, THOUGHT HANZŌ.

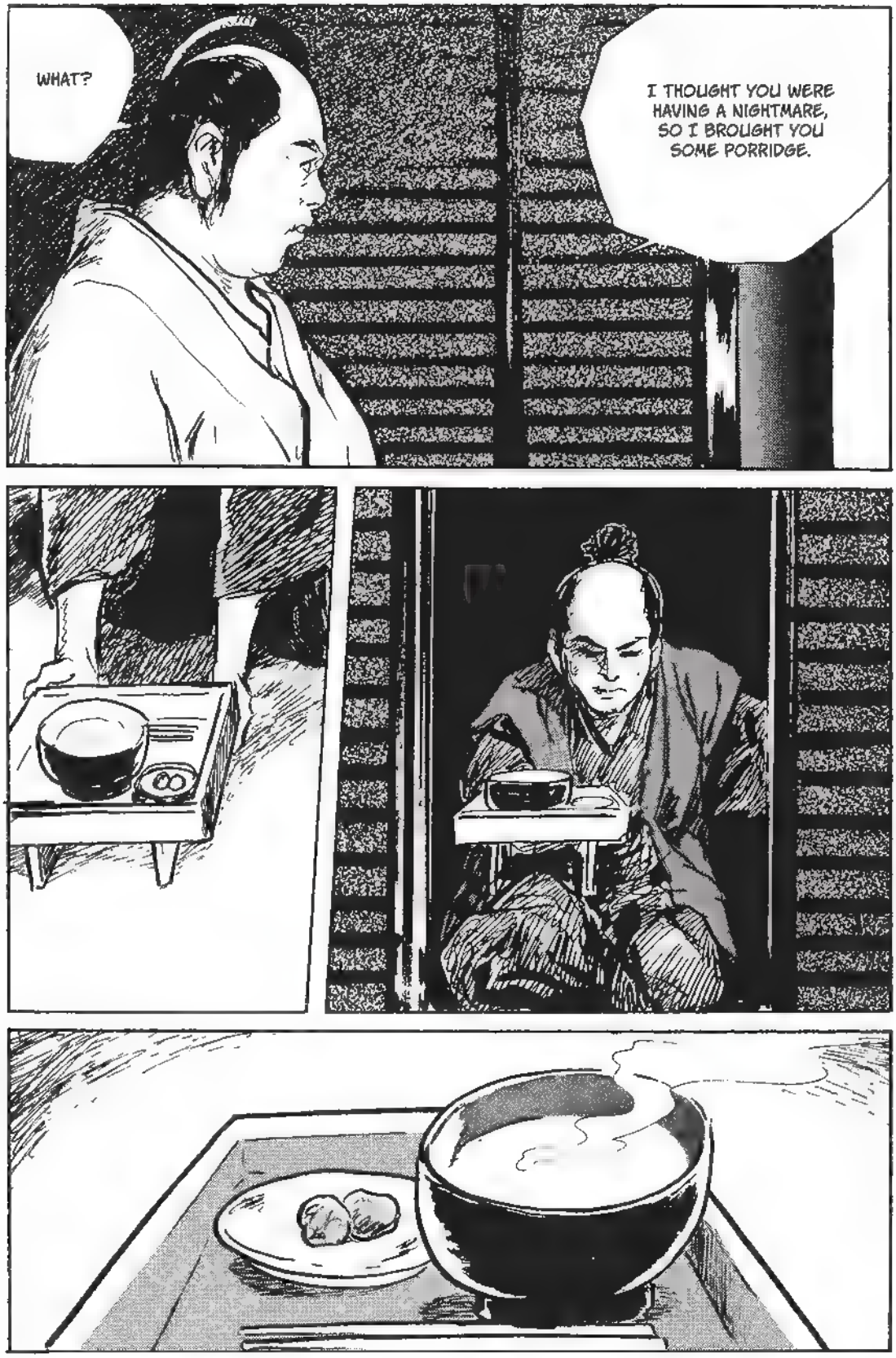
AND THEY MADE IT SAFELY TO OKAZAKI CASTLE.


URRNG.

URRRG.

UHHH.
URK!

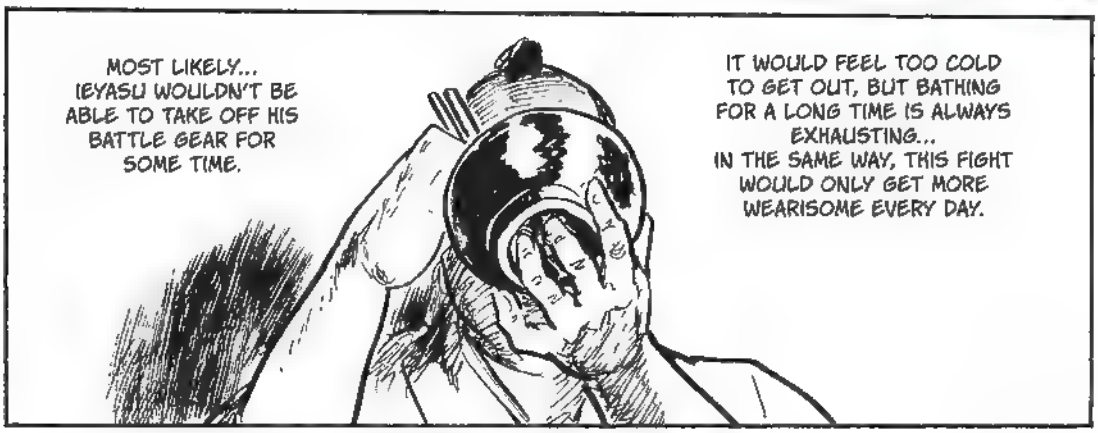
AUH!
IT...
IT WAS JUST
A DREAM...
THAT YOU,
HANZÔ?
MILORD.


WHAT?
I THOUGHT YOU WERE HAVING A NIGHTMARE, SO I BROUGHT YOU SOME PORRIDGE.

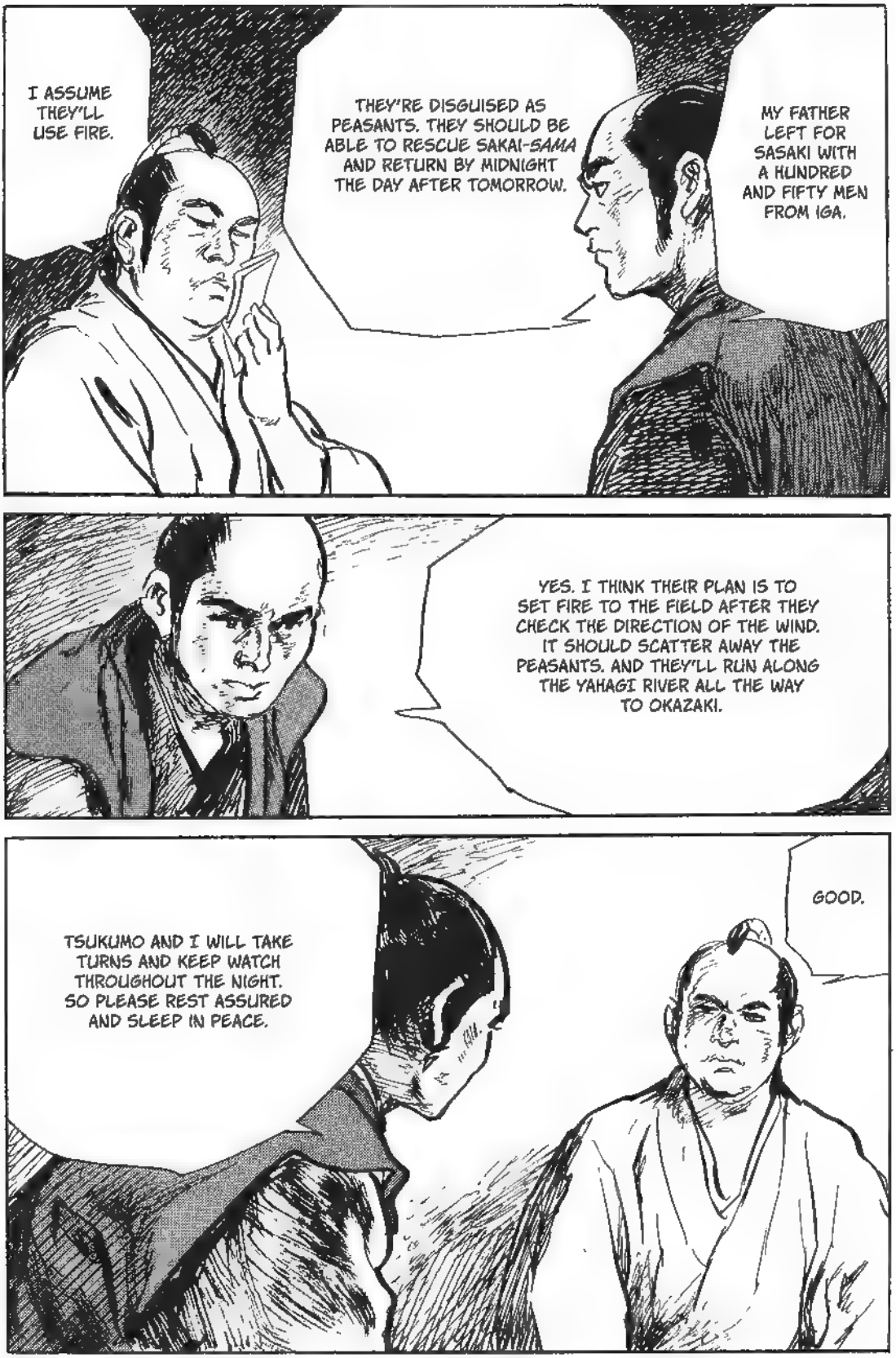
YOU DREAM WHEN YOU SLEEP LIGHT.
YES.
EATING PORRIDGE PREVENTS NIGHTMARES?
IT'S NOT A GOOD IDEA TO EAT SOMETHING TOO HEAVY. BUT PORRIDGE DIGESTS WELL WHILE LEAVING YOU FEELING FULL.
AN EMPTY STOMACH MAKES YOU SLEEP LIGHT, WHILE A FULL STOMACH BRINGS ON DEEP SLEEP.
HM.
IT'S *SHINOBI*'S WISDOM. YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO SLEEP WELL.
I SEE. INTERESTING.

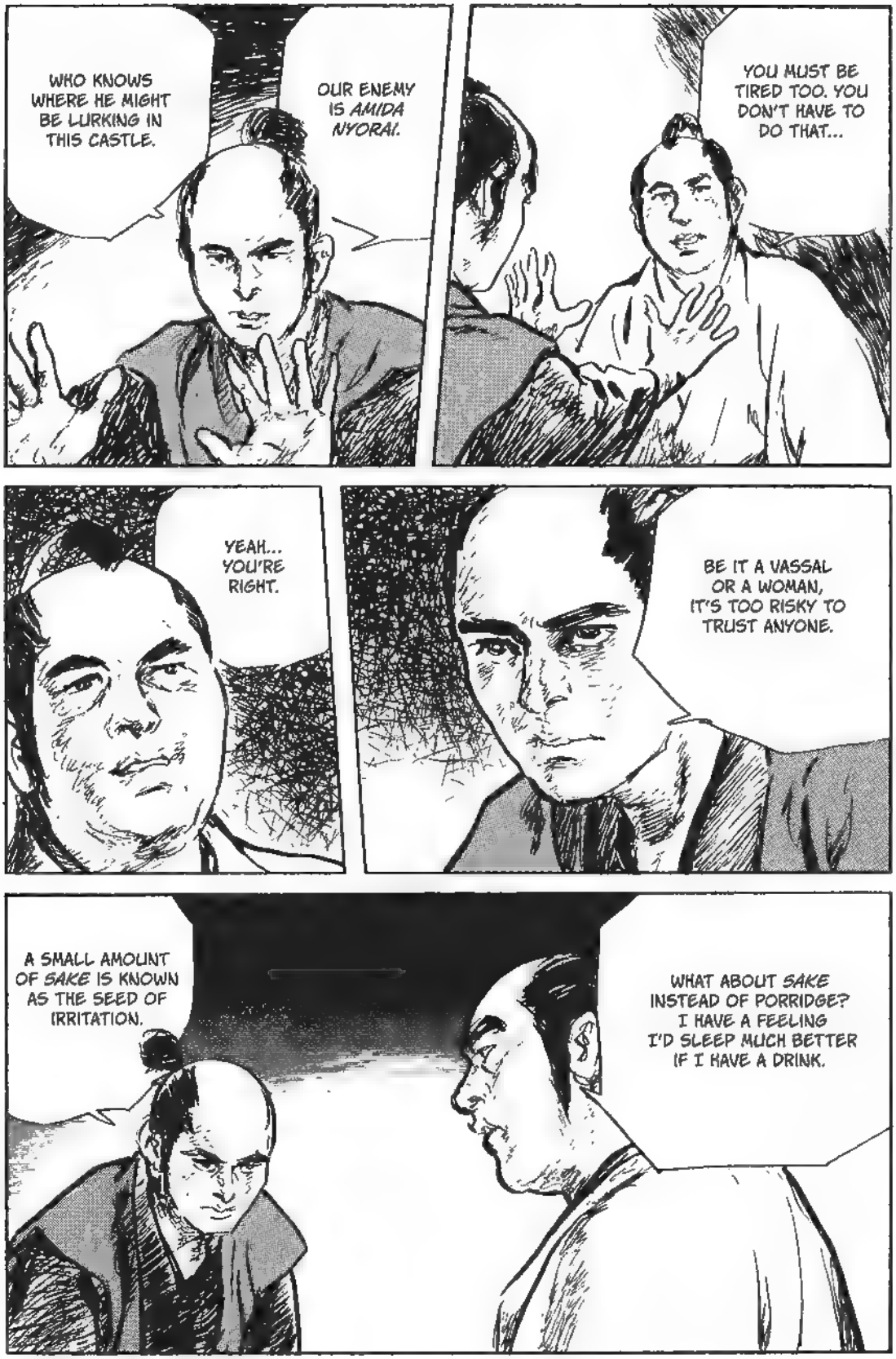
THERE WAS NO SUCH SHINOBI TECHNIQUE, OF COURSE. HANZŌ MADE IT UP AT RANDOM.
WSK
WSK

BECAUSE HANZŌ WANTED TO BE SURE IEYASU SLEPT WELL.
THE WAR WOULD START THE NEXT DAY. AND IT WAS GOING TO BE LIKE BATHING IN LUKEWARM WATER.

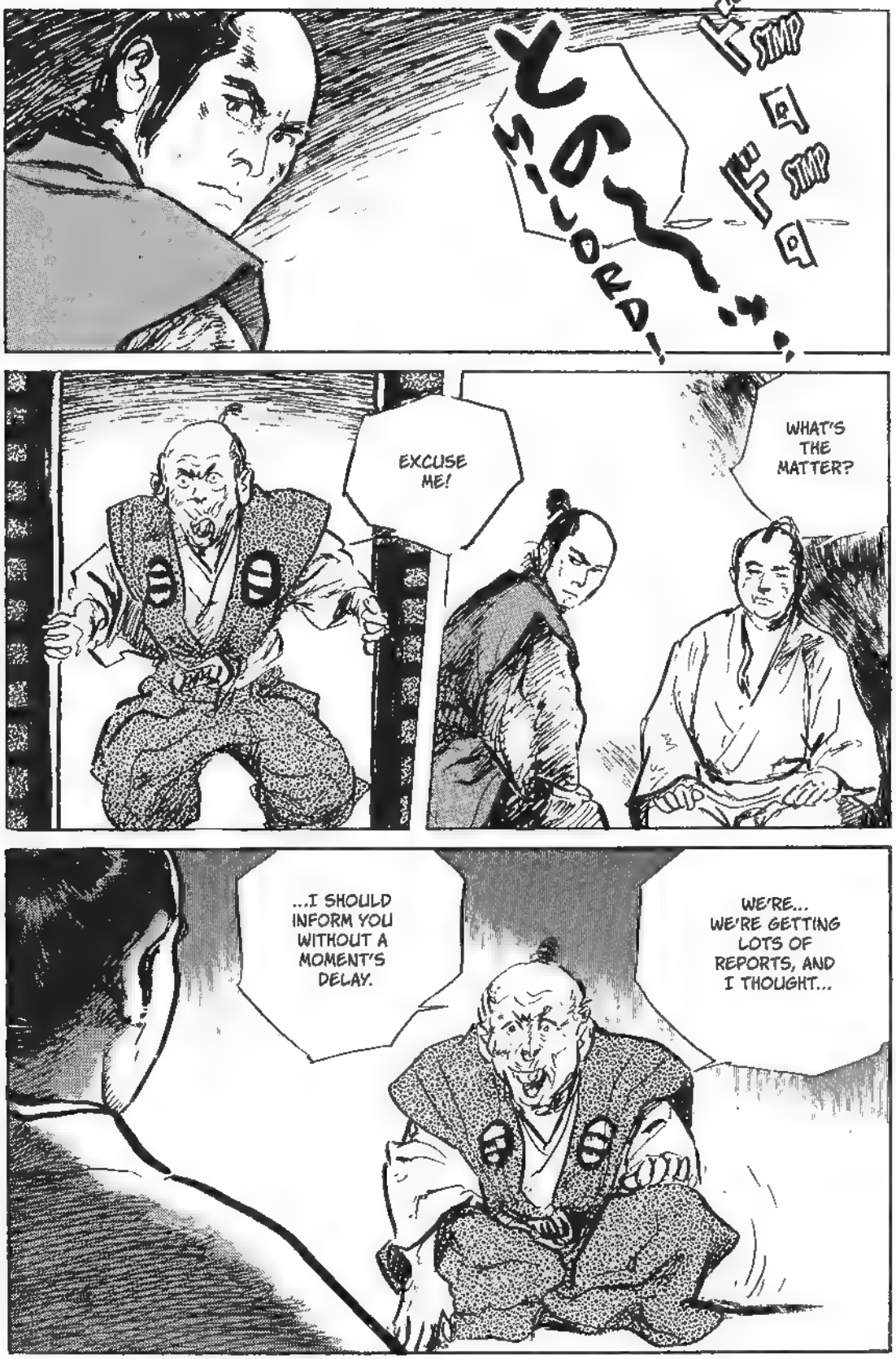

MOST LIKELY... IEYASU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO TAKE OFF HIS BATTLE GEAR FOR SOME TIME.
IT WOULD FEEL TOO COLD TO GET OUT, BUT BATHING FOR A LONG TIME IS ALWAYS EXHAUSTING... IN THE SAME WAY, THIS FIGHT WOULD ONLY GET MORE WEARISOME EVERY DAY.

THAT'S WHY HANZŌ WANTED HIM TO BE ABLE TO SLEEP WELL THAT ONE NIGHT AT THE VERY LEAST.
EVEN IF THINGS ENDED QUICKLY, IT WOULDN'T BE UNTIL NEXT YEAR... PERHAPS FEBRUARY OR MARCH.


I ASSUME THEY'LL USE FIRE.
THEY'RE DISGUISED AS PEASANTS. THEY SHOULD BE ABLE TO RESCUE SAKAI-*SAMA* AND RETURN BY MIDNIGHT THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW.
MY FATHER LEFT FOR SASAKI WITH A HUNDRED AND FIFTY MEN FROM IGA.
YES. I THINK THEIR PLAN IS TO SET FIRE TO THE FIELD AFTER THEY CHECK THE DIRECTION OF THE WIND. IT SHOULD SCATTER AWAY THE PEASANTS. AND THEY'LL RUN ALONG THE YAHAGI RIVER ALL THE WAY TO OKAZAKI.
GOOD.
TSUKUMO AND I WILL TAKE TURNS AND KEEP WATCH THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT. SO PLEASE REST ASSURED AND SLEEP IN PEACE.


WHO KNOWS WHERE HE MIGHT BE LURKING IN THIS CASTLE.
OUR ENEMY IS *AMIDA NYORAI*.
YOU MUST BE TIRED TOO. YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THAT...
YEAH... YOU'RE RIGHT.
BE IT A VASSAL OR A WOMAN, IT'S TOO RISKY TO TRUST ANYONE.
A SMALL AMOUNT OF *SAKE* IS KNOWN AS THE SEED OF IRRITATION.
WHAT ABOUT *SAKE* INSTEAD OF PORRIDGE? I HAVE A FEELING I'D SLEEP MUCH BETTER IF I HAVE A DRINK.

THAT'S TRUE.
HA HA HA HA HA HA.
AND IF YOU DRINK ENOUGH TO GET INTOXICATED, IT WILL BE HARDER ON YOU TOMORROW.
MOST LIKELY YOU WILL START THINKING AND GET ANGRY.
HA HA HA HA HA HA
ONCE I START DRINKING, I BET IMAGES OF BUDDHA AND THOSE PEASANTS WILL APPEAR IN THE BACK OF MY MIND. AND THAT WILL SURELY RANKLE.
IT LOOKS LIKE HE'LL BE ABLE TO HAVE A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.
YAWN


STMP
STMP
EXCUSE ME!
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
...I SHOULD INFORM YOU WITHOUT A MOMENT'S DELAY.
WE'RE... WE'RE GETTING LOTS OF REPORTS, AND I THOUGHT...

AND, ER... SAKAI TADAHISA AND HONDA YAHACHIRŌ!
KI... KIRA YOSHIAKI, ARAKAWA YOSHIHIRO, NATSUME YOSHINOBU, MATSUDAIRA MASAHISA...
EXCUSE ME.
THE BASTARDS!
AND EVEN TAKAGI HIROMASA IS SIDING WITH THE REBELS AND WAVING THEIR BANNERS!

THE CREDO OF SHINOBI WAS TO HOLD... WHAT IN YOUR HEART AGAIN?
YES...
HANZŌ!
I TOO... ENDURED THAT WAY THROUGHOUT MY LONG LIFE AS A HOSTAGE.
IT IS TO ENDURE BY HOLDING A BLADE IN ONE'S HEART.
PORRIDGE WILL BRING ON DEEP SLEEP? WHAT NONSENSE.
I MIGHT KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO ENDURE EVEN BETTER THAN A REAL SHINOBI LIKE YOU.

SO LONG AS YOU ARE WITH ME...
DON'T FRET. MY HEART ISN'T FRAGILE ENOUGH TO MAKE ME SLEEPLESS.
...I CAN SLEEP WITHOUT FEAR.

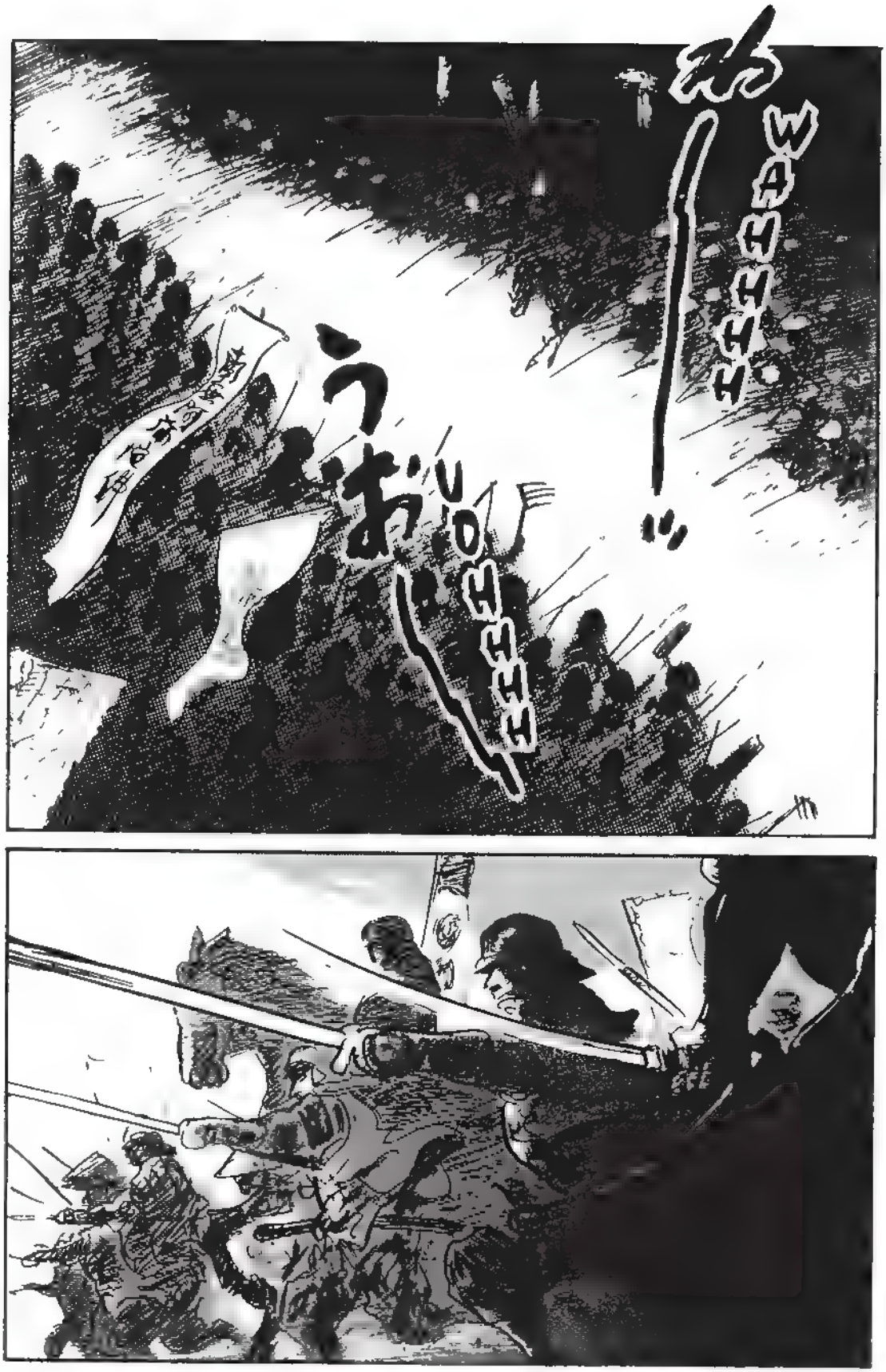
KRMPT
KRMPT
KRMP

YAHHHH

I'LL DESTROY YOU!!
YOU DISLOYAL, INSOLENT MAGGOTS, BETRAYING YOUR MASTER!
MAGGOTS!!
SLAUGHTER 'EM ALL!
LET THE BUDDHA'S PUNISHMENT FALL UPON HIM!
HE IS BUDDHA'S ENEMY! KILL IEYASU AND DEFEND THE TEACHINGS OF BUDDHA!

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH *AMIDA NYORAI* IS WHAT'S ETERNAL!
YOUR PLEDGE OF LOYALTY IS OF THIS LIFE!
DEATH IS NO DEATH! IT'S ONLY A PATH TO BE TAKEN!
FEAR NOT!!

GONGUJŌDO
ONRIEDO
GONGUJŌDO
ONRIEDO


WAHHHH
うおー
UOHHHH

MAGGOTS!
DAMN!
MILORD! YOU MUST NOT RAGE!
..CHASE THEM TOO FAR!
WE MUST NOT ..

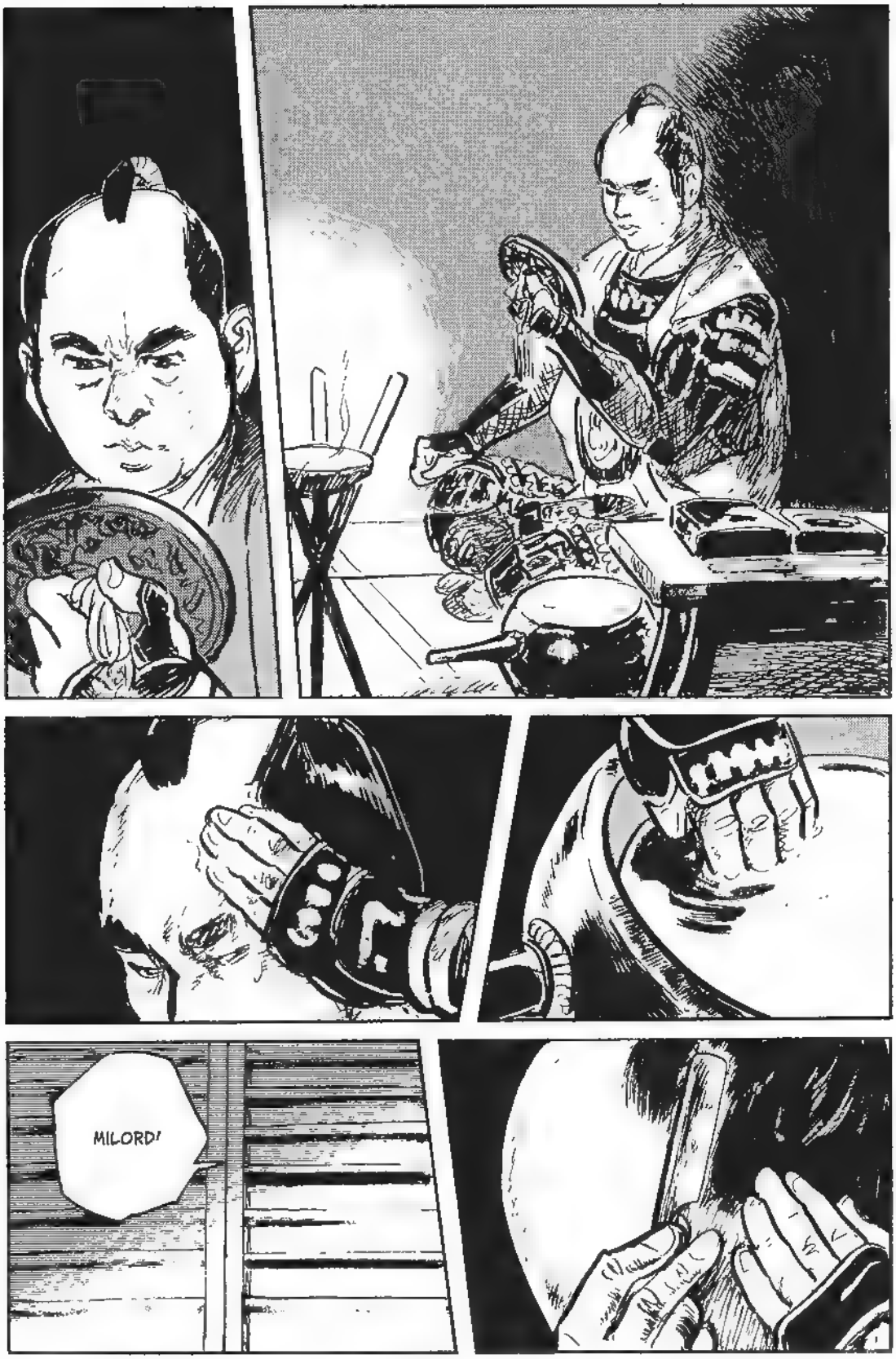
YOU TURNED ON YOUR MASTER, YOU TRAITOR!
HACHIYA HANNOJŌ!
RRRRG!
MMG.
PARDON ME!

MAGO-SHICHIRŌ!!
RUNNING AWAY?! MAGO-SHICHIRŌ!!
YOU TOO?!
TSUCHIYA SHIGEHARU!!

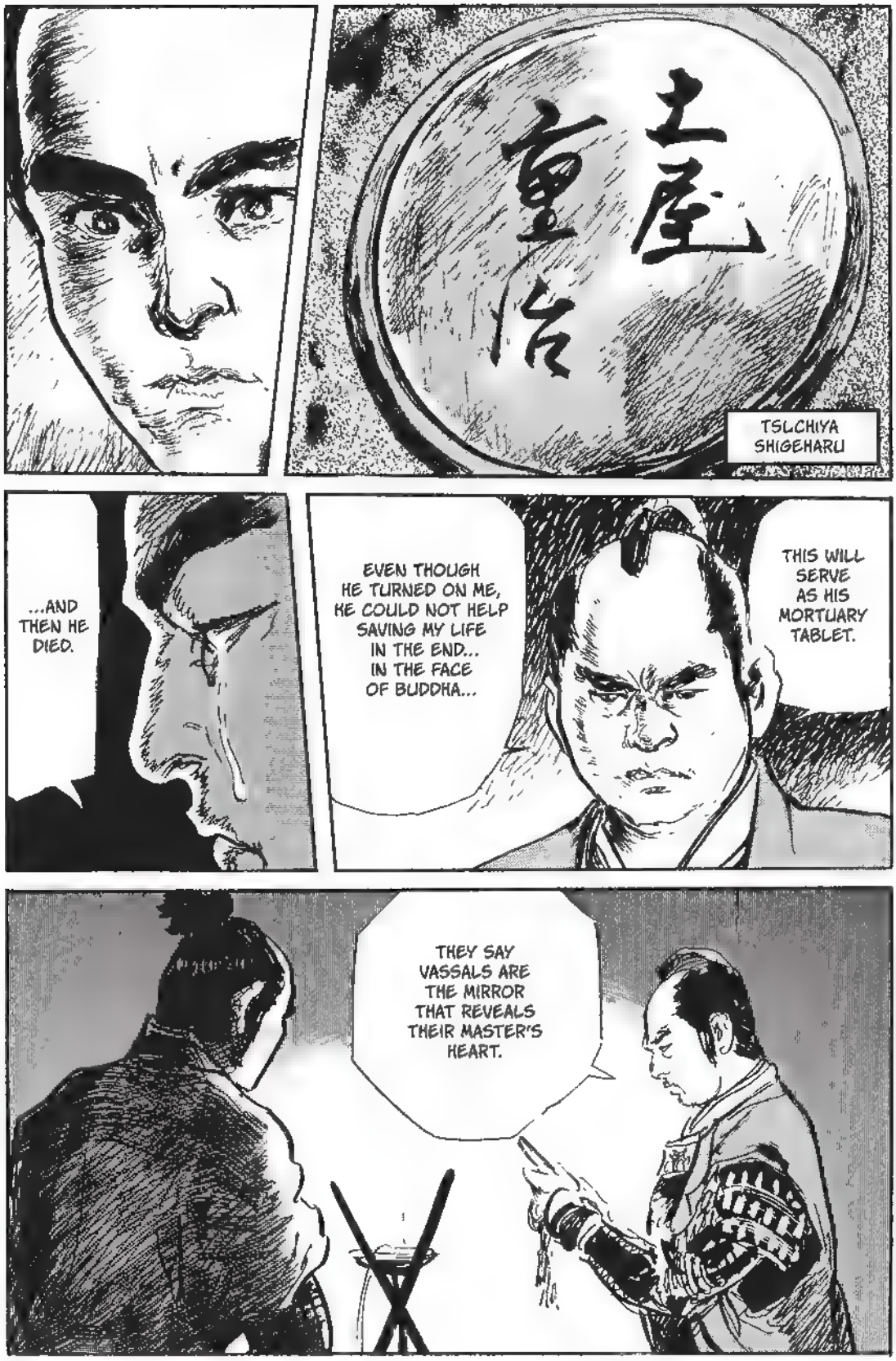
THWACK

YOU MONSTER! YOU'VE BETRAYED AMIDA NYORAI-SAMA!
NUOOHHHH

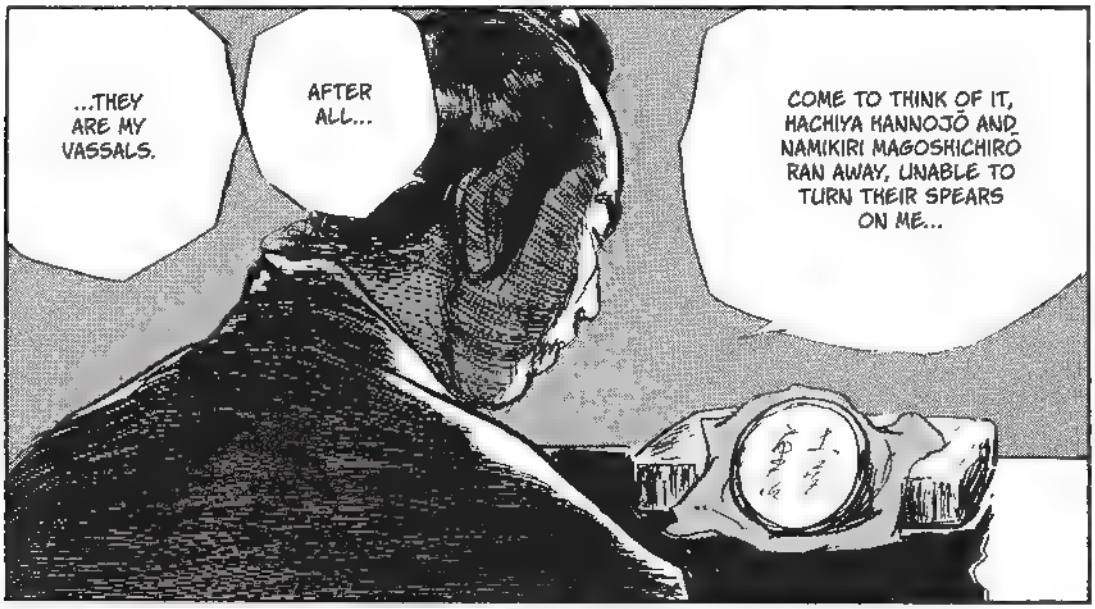
MILORD... I COULDN'T TURN MY BLADE ON YOU... AFTER ALL...
SHIGEHARU!
NO MATTER HOW JUST ITS CAUSE, IT WAS A GRIEVOUS BATTLE. IT WAS ALREADY LATE AUTUMN. AND YET, DESPITE THE APPROACHING WINTER, THIS WAR HAD JUST BEGUN.
I WILL... APOLOGIZE TO AMIDA BUDDHA... ON YOUR BEHALF... IN THE NETHERWORLD...
PLEASE LIVE LONG...
URRRG...


MILORD!

I WAS THINKING, IF I BECAME A BONZE, I MIGHT BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S IN THEIR HEARTS, IF EVEN JUST A LITTLE.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
HA HA HA HA HA. I'M JOKING.


土屋重治
TSUCHIYA SHIGEHARU
...AND THEN HE DIED.
EVEN THOUGH HE TURNED ON ME, HE COULD NOT HELP SAVING MY LIFE IN THE END... IN THE FACE OF BUDDHA...
THIS WILL SERVE AS HIS MORTUARY TABLET.
THEY SAY VASSALS ARE THE MIRROR THAT REVEALS THEIR MASTER'S HEART.

IF A MASTER'S DEEDS ARE JUST, THE ACTIONS OF HIS VASSALS WILL ALSO BE JUST
AND IF A MASTER'S DEEDS ARE WRONG, VASSALS WILL GO ASTRAY.
THEREFORE, A MASTER MUST WATCH HIS VASSALS' ACTIONS AND ADMONISH HIMSELF
TSUCHIYA SHIGEHARU
WITH THIS MIRROR, I WILL REMEMBER HIM FOR SEVEN DAYS AND NIGHTS, AND REFLECT MY HEART IN IT TOO.
I HAVE A FEELING... SHIGEHARU TAUGHT ME I AM IN THE RIGHT.


...THEY ARE MY VASSALS.
AFTER ALL...
COME TO THINK OF IT, HACHIYA HANNOJŌ AND NAMIKIRI MAGOSHICHIRŌ RAN AWAY, UNABLE TO TURN THEIR SPEARS ON ME...

DON'T YOU THINK SO, KANZŌ?

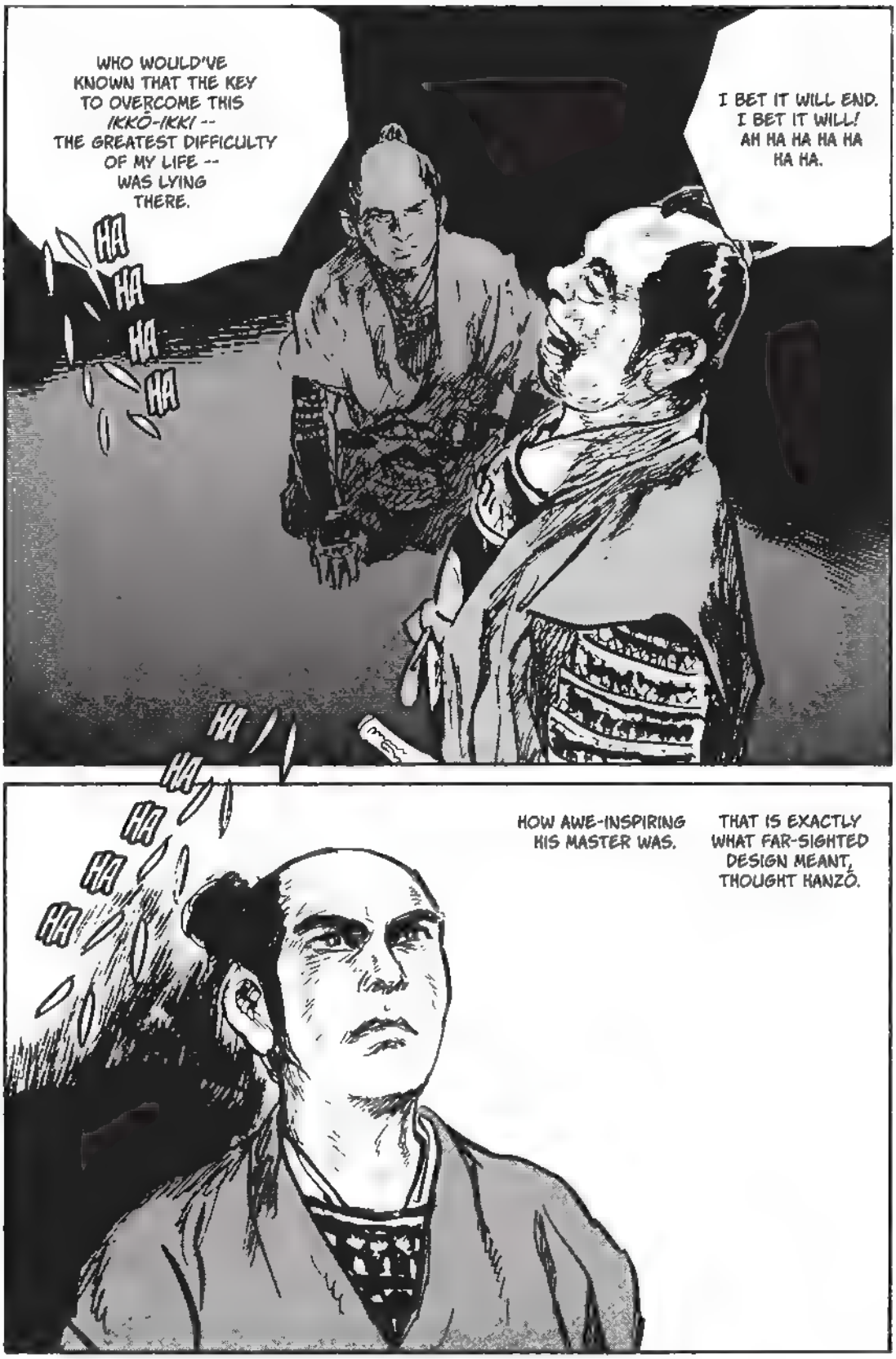
ABSOLUTELY, SIR.

NO.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO SLEEP? I WILL PREPARE THE BEDDING AT ONCE
NOW IS A PERFECT CHANCE FOR HIM.
I WONDER WHY UJIZANE ISN'T ATTACKING US.

YES SIR.
HANZŌ!
TAP
I WANT TO FIGHT A WAR THAT I CAN REFLECT ON A MIRROR.
WHA... WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
CAN YOU THINK OF A WAY TO MAKE UJIZANE INVADE MIKAWA?
IF THE IMAGAWA FORCES ADVANCE UPON US AT A TIME LIKE THIS, WHAT WOULD THE VASSALS ON THE REBELS' SIDE DO?
?!

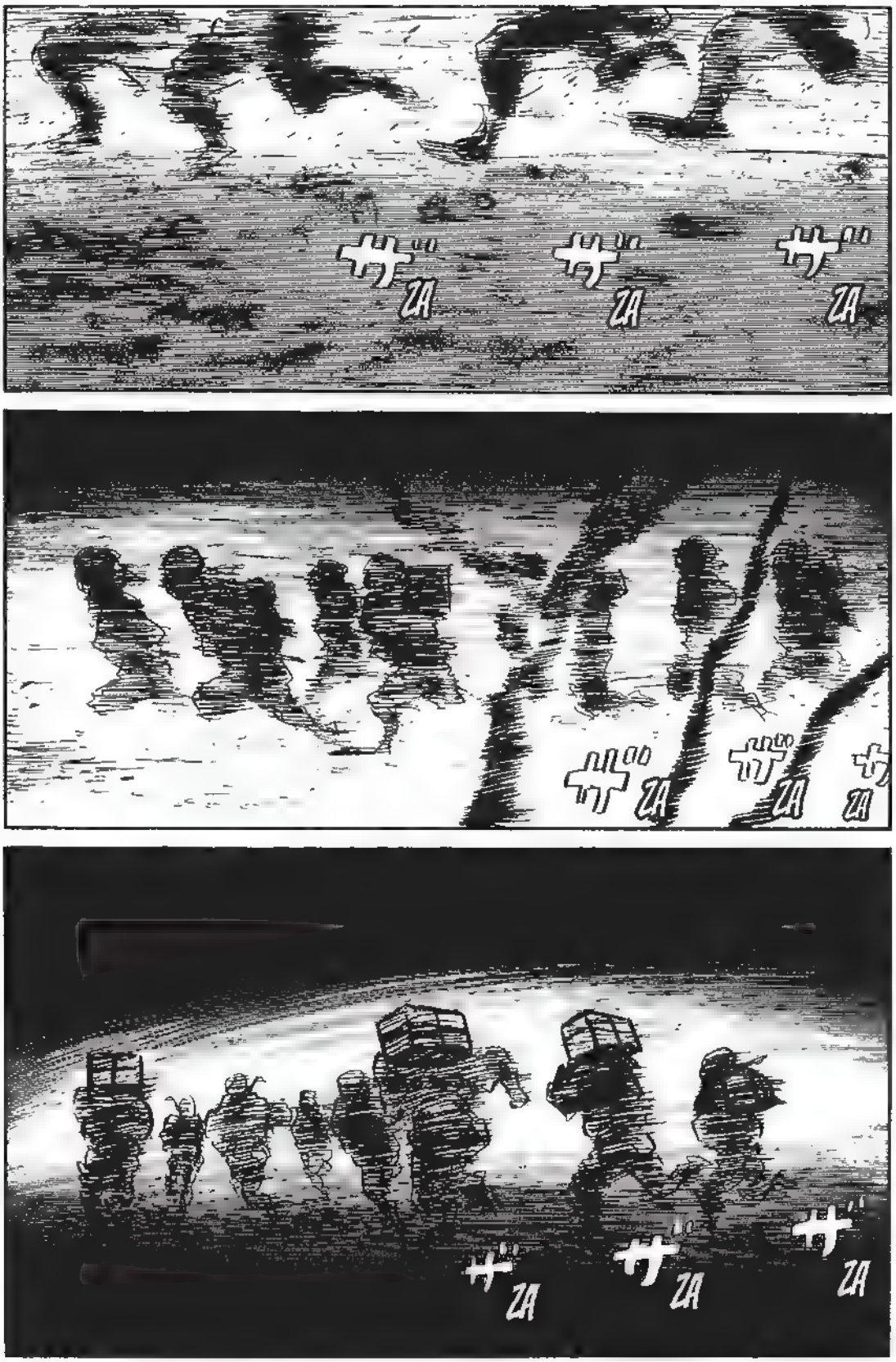
THERE ARE THREE POSSIBILITIES. EITHER THEY'LL CONTINUE TO FIGHT ME, PAYING NO HEED TO IMAGAWA.
OR THEY'LL PULL BACK AND SIMPLY WATCH HOW I FARE.
OR THEY'LL RETURN TO ME AND, UNITED, WE'LL FIGHT IMAGAWA TOGETHER.
EVEN THOUGH THEY'D RATHER NOT, THEY ARE WITH THE INSURGENTS BECAUSE OF THEIR RELIGION. BUT STILL, THEY ARE MIKAWA *SAMURAI*.
HOW COULD THEY STAND BY AND WATCH? THEY WILL RETURN AND FIGHT ALONGSIDE YOU!
IT IS A WAR OF MIRRORS THAT WILL SHOW THE TRUE VALUE OF A MASTER!
IF IMAGAWA MARCHES IN, MY VASSALS WILL COME BACK TO ME!

NO MIKAWA SAMURAI COULD BEAR THAT!
NEITHER BUDDHA NOR THEIR FAITH WOULD MATTER! BECAUSE WE'D BE AT RISK OF LOSING OUR TERRITORY!
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
THAT'S WHY IT'S A WAR THAT WILL REVEAL EACH OF OUR HEARTS! AND MEANWHILE, THE IKKŌ-IKKI WILL CEASE.
WHO CARES IF WE PERISH, IF THAT'S THE KIND OF VASSALS I HAVE?
UNLESS WE REUNITE AND FIGHT TOGETHER, MIKAWA MATSUDAIRA WILL BE DESTROYED.


WHO WOULD'VE KNOWN THAT THE KEY TO OVERCOME THIS IKKŌ-IKKI -- THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY OF MY LIFE -- WAS LYING THERE.
HA HA HA HA
I BET IT WILL END. I BET IT WILL! AH HA HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA
HOW AWE-INSPIRING HIS MASTER WAS.
THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT FAR-SIGHTED DESIGN MEANT, THOUGHT HANZŌ.

YES SIR
HANZŌ!
PROVOKE UJIZANE BY USING RUMORS.
TAKE *IGAMONO* TO SUNPU AND START A FIRE!
AND MAKE HIM BELIEVE THAT IEYASU OF MIKAWA IS IN ALLIANCE WITH ODA, BUSILY PREPARING A FORAY INTO SUNPU, AND THAT UNLESS HE STRIKES NOW, HE'LL BE STRUCK INSTEAD.

YES SIR!
DO WHATEVER YOU MUST TO MAKE HIM INVADE MIKAWA!
ALSO SPREAD A RUMOR AMONG THE INSURGENTS THAT UJIZANE IS ON THE MOVE.
DESPITE ALL THAT, IF UJIZANE REFUSES TO DO ANYTHING, I'LL ATTACK HIM INSTEAD!
HA HA HA HA HA.
THERE WILL BE NO TIME FOR THIS UPRISING!
HA HA HA HA HA HA.
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA


ZA
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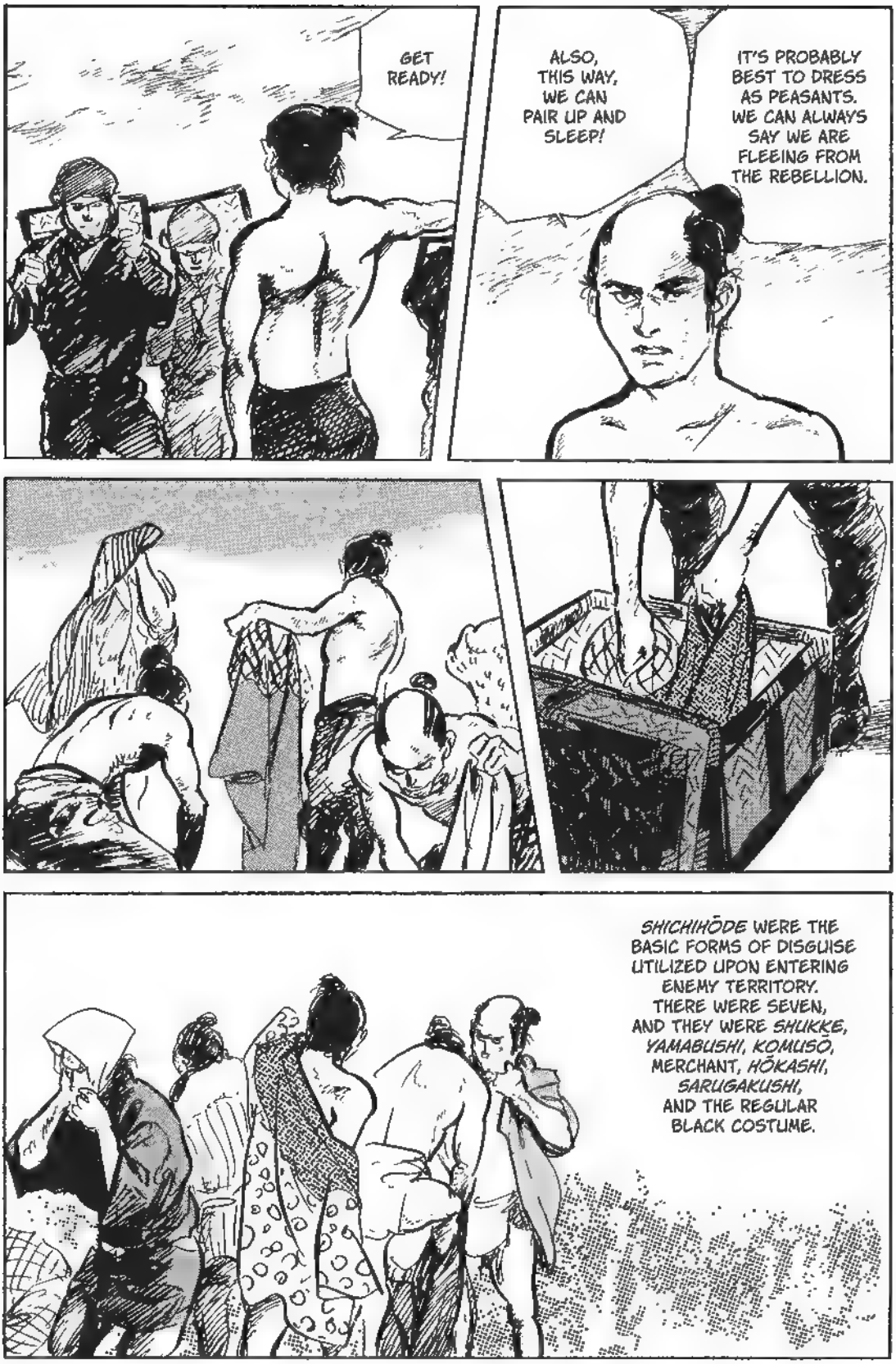
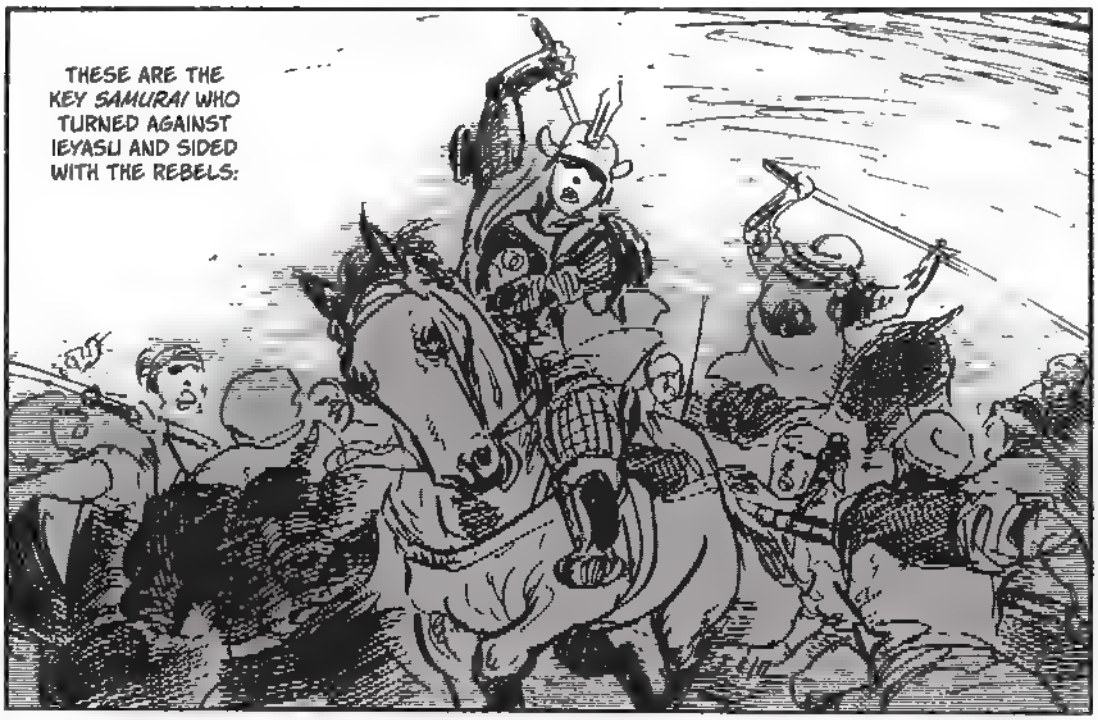
TIME FOR SHICHIHŌDE.
IT'S DAWN.


GET READY!
ALSO, THIS WAY, WE CAN PAIR UP AND SLEEP!
IT'S PROBABLY BEST TO DRESS AS PEASANTS. WE CAN ALWAYS SAY WE ARE FLEEING FROM THE REBELLION.
SHICHIHŌDE WERE THE BASIC FORMS OF DISGUISE UTILIZED UPON ENTERING ENEMY TERRITORY. THERE WERE SEVEN, AND THEY WERE SHUKKE, YAMABUSHI, KOMUSŌ, MERCHANT, HŌKASHI, SARUGAKUSHI, AND THE REGULAR BLACK COSTUME.

YAHHHH
PLUNGE AHEAD!
KRMPT
KRMPT
KRMPT
KRMPT


THESE ARE THE KEY *SAMURAI* WHO TURNED AGAINST IEYASU AND SIDED WITH THE REBELS:

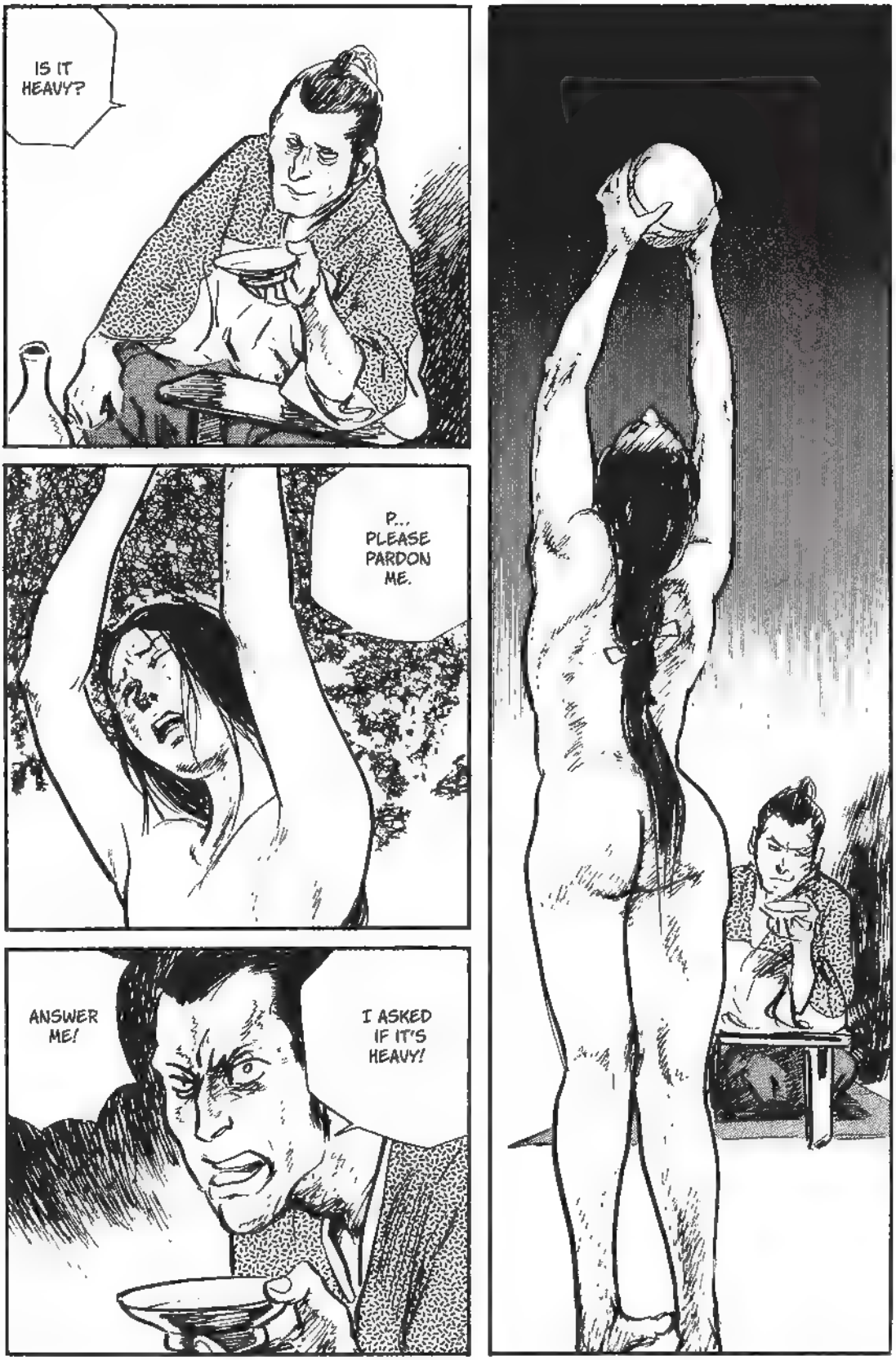
NATSUME YOSHINOBU, IN NOBA CASTLE. MATSUDAIRA SHICHIRŌ MASAHISA, IN ŌKUSA CASTLE.
KIRA YOSHIAKI, BASED IN TŌJŌ CASTLE. ARAKAWA YOSHIHIRO, IN HACHIMEN CASTLE.

SAKAI TADAHISA,
IN UENO CASTLE.
ISHIKAWA HIRONARI,
IN OGAWA FORT.
ONO NOBUCHIKA,
IN KARIYA CASTLE.

YADA SAKUJŪRŌ,
IN IZUMIDA. ASHIYA
KICHIDAYŪ, IN KAMIJŌ.
KUZE SANSHIRŌ,
IN IUCHI, AND
SO FORTH.

THE FOLLOWING VASSALS, HOWEVER, TURNED ON IEYASU PURELY BECAUSE OF THEIR FAITH:
IN ADDITION, EVEN THOUGH SOME LIKE NATSUME YOSHINOBU HAD PLEDGED THEIR LOYALTY TO IEYASU AS THEIR LORD BY BIRTH, THEY WERE LOOKING FOR THE CHANCE TO BECOME INDEPENDENT WARLORDS THEMSELVES.
SOME OF THEM, SUCH AS SAKAI TADAHISA, SIDED WITH THE INSURGENTS NOT BECAUSE OF THEIR RELIGIOUS FAITH BUT BECAUSE THEY WERE CLOSER TO IMAGAWA.
HACHIYA HANNOJŌ AND OVER A HUNDRED MEN IN HARISAKI SHŌMANJI TEMPLE.
THE ISHIKAWA AND HONDA CLANS, LED BY ŌZU HANEMON IN NODERA HONSHŌJI TEMPLE.
KURACHI HEIEMON AND TWO HUNDRED MEN BASED IN SASAKI JŌGŪJI TEMPLE.

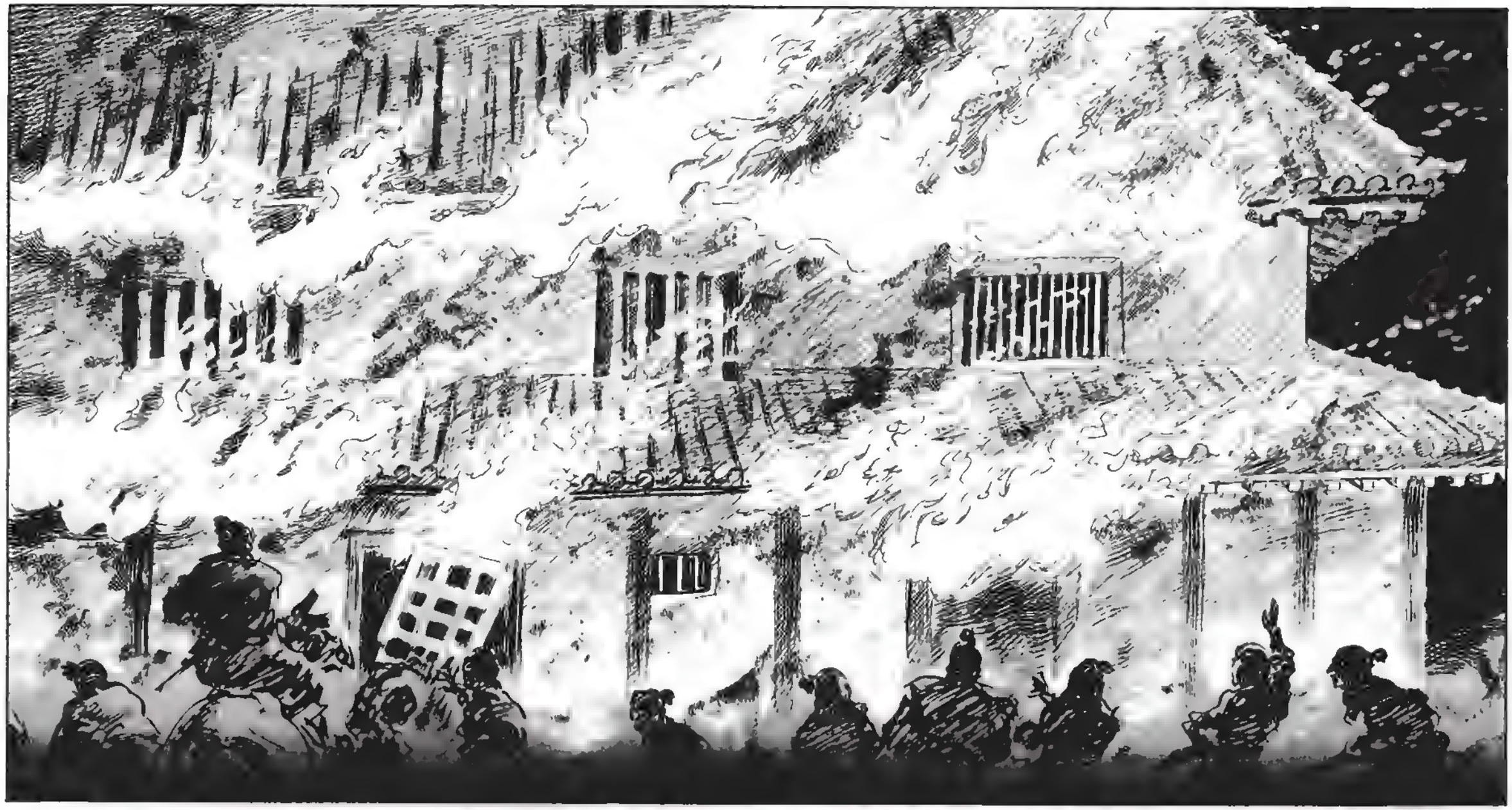
ŌHASHI DENJŪRŌ AND OVER A HUNDRED MEN IN TORO HONSHŪJI TEMPLE.
WHATEVER YOU DO, MAKE UJIZANE MARCH INTO OUR TERRITORY!
KANZŌ, HURRY!
I'M COUNTING ON YOU, KANZŌ!


IS IT HEAVY?
P... PLEASE PARDON ME.
ANSWER ME!
I ASKED IF IT'S HEAVY!

YOU SAID IMAGAWA TERRITORY WAS FAR HEAVIER WHEN I ASKED WHICH WEIGHED MORE, THAT BALL OR OUR TERRITORY.
IT MUST BE. EVEN A BALL HAS WEIGHT.
IT'S... IT'S... HEAVY... SIR.
WHAT DO YOU EXPECT IF I STOP KICKING AND INSTEAD GO OUT TO WAR AS MY FATHER DID?!
DO YOU UNDERSTAND?! SO LONG AS I KEEP KICKING THAT BALL, WE REMAIN AT PEACE!
BUT THAT BALL ISN'T JUST ANY BALL! IT'S WHAT I KICK -- I, WHO DEFEND OUR LAND!

Y... YES... IT'S AS YOU SAY...
IMAGAWA WILL PERISH! THAT'S WHAT! THAT'S WHY THAT BALL WEIGHS THE SAME AS OUR LAND!
I... I HAVE NEWS!
STMP
STMP
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA

IT APPEARS THE BLAZE WAS STARTED FROM INSIDE, WITH OIL... THEY'RE GOING UP IN FLAMES.
WH... WHAT?
SOMEONE LIT FIRE TO STOREHOUSES TWO AND THREE, WHERE OUR ARMY PROVISIONS ARE KEPT!
WHAT'S THE MATTER?!
GAK!
AND THEY'RE PROBABLY WORKING FOR IEYASU OF MIKAWA.
WE SUSPECT IT'S SUPPA.
WHO... WHO DID THAT...?



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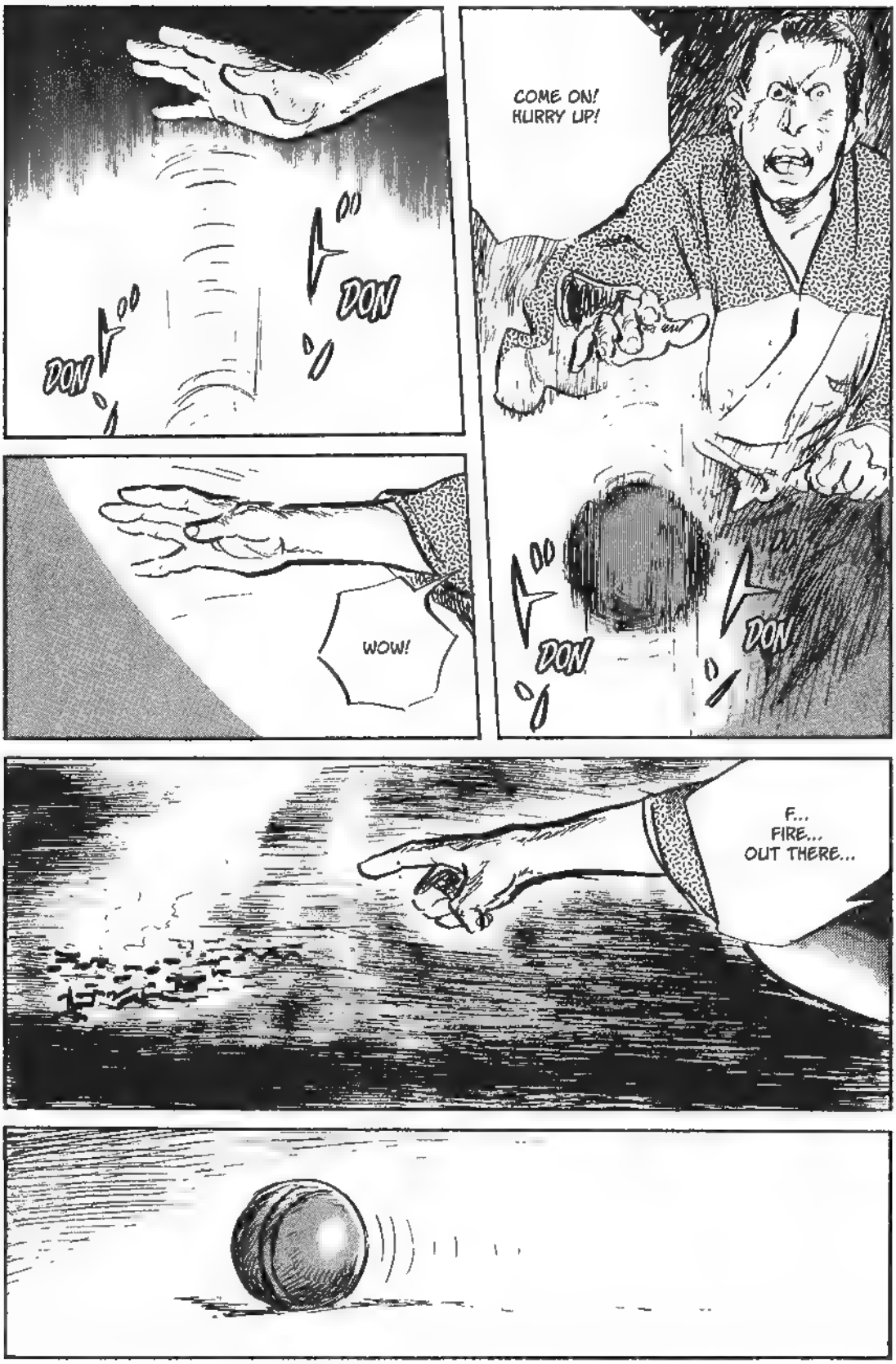
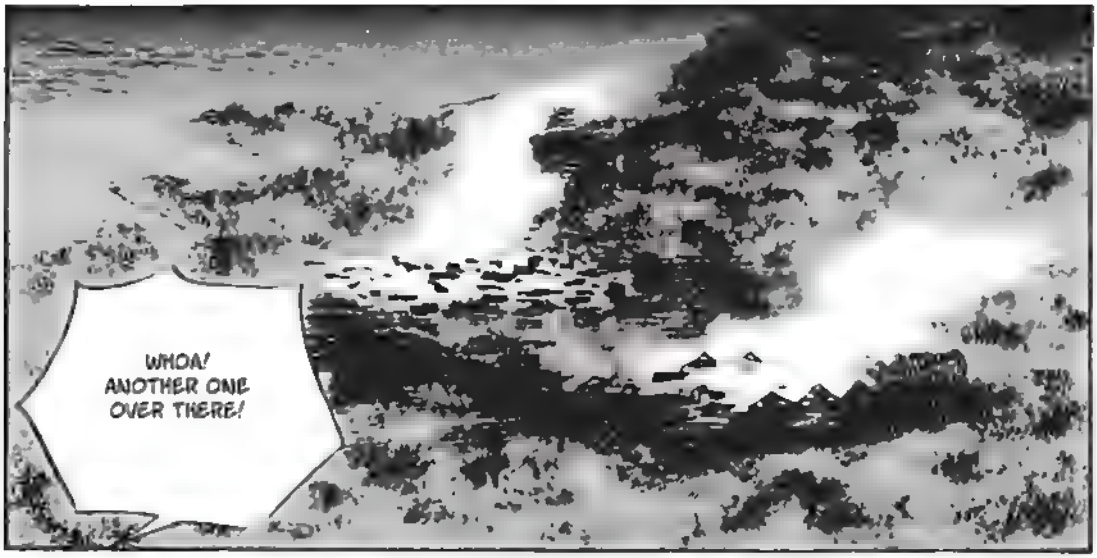
POUR WATER ON THEM TO MAKE SURE SPARKS CAN'T JUMP!
PROTECT STOREHOUSES FOUR AND FIVE!
AS FOR NUMBER TWO, JUST LET IT BURN.
SALVAGE AS MUCH RICE AS POSSIBLE FROM NUMBER THREE!

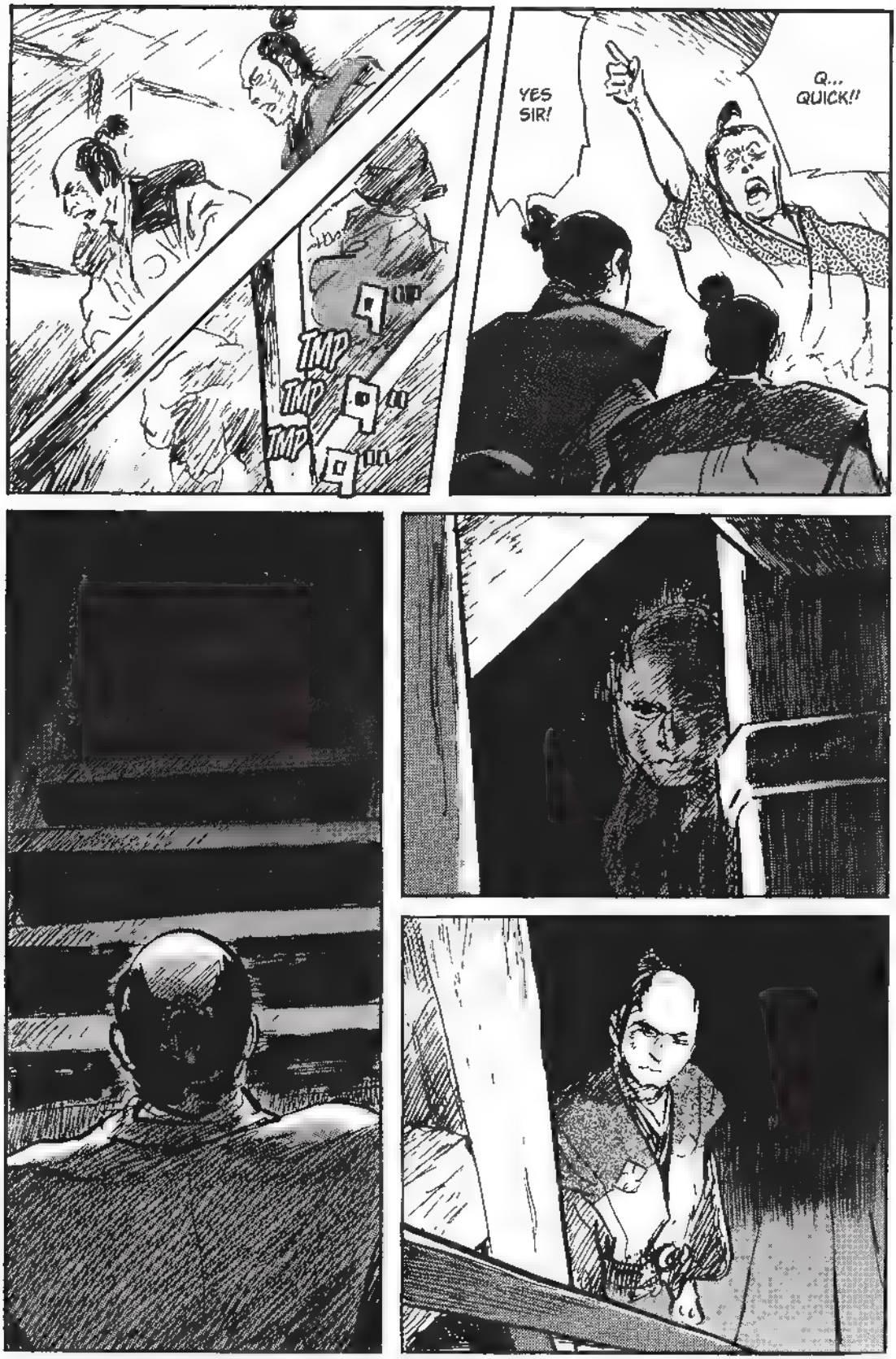
FAST!!
URG... MMG... GO OUT!
PUT IT OUT QUICKLY!
DON
DON

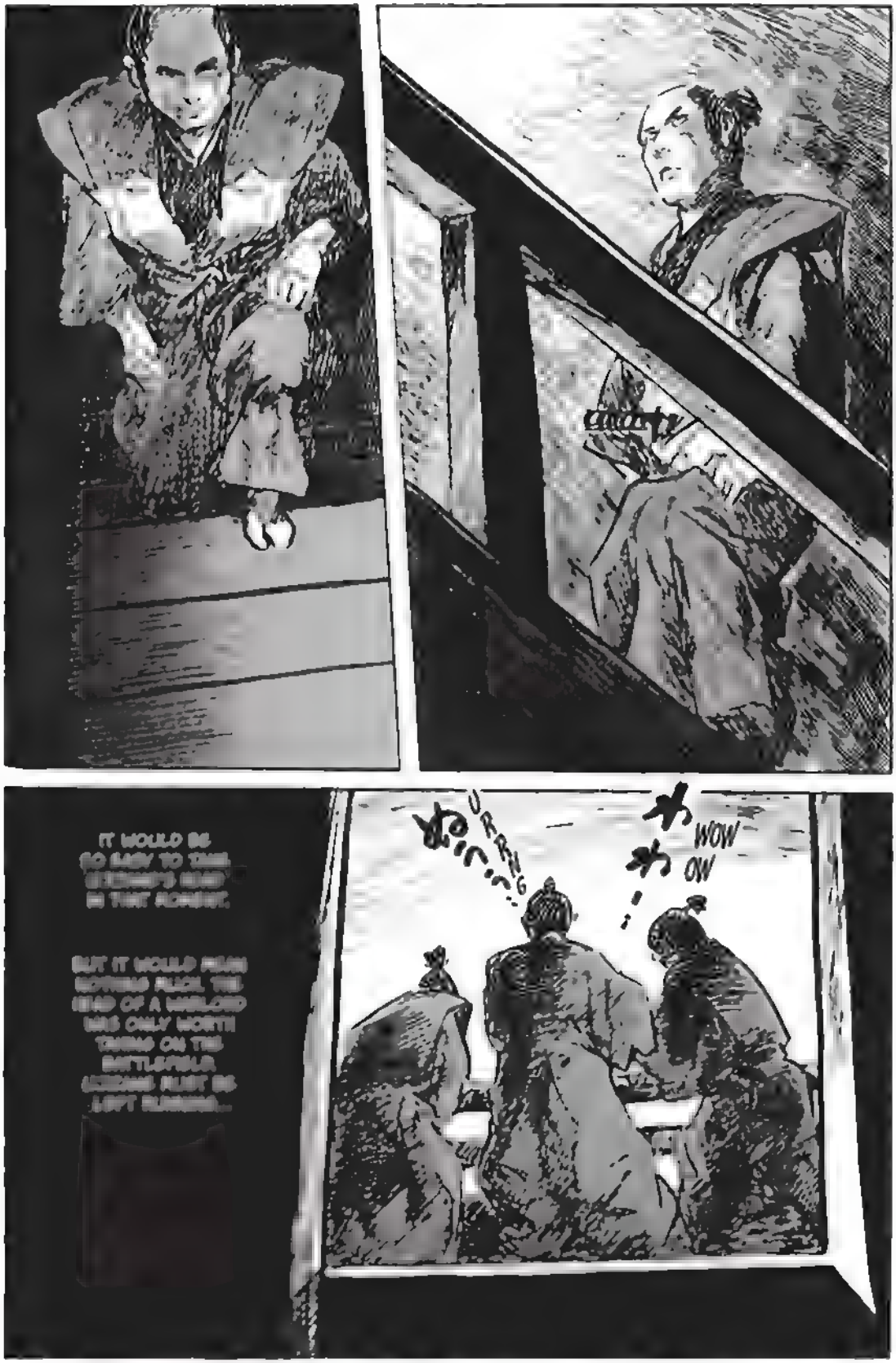

DON
DON
COME ON!
HURRY UP!
WOW!
DON
DON
F...
FIRE...
OUT THERE...


WHOA! ANOTHER ONE OVER THERE!

WOW
OW
OW

AND EXTINGUISH THE FIRE! LEFT UNCHECKED, SUNPU WILL BE ENGULFED IN SEA OF FLAMES!
G... GET THE MEN OUT AND SET TIGHT SECURITY AROUND THE CASTLE!


TMP
TMP
TMP
YES SIR!
Q... QUICK!!


IT WOULD BE SO EASY TO TAKE [illegible] IN THAT MOMENT.
BUT IT WOULD MEAN NOTHING. KILL THE HEAD OF A WARLORD AND ONLY WORTH TWENTY ON THE BATTLEFIELD. [illegible] MUST BE LEFT STANDING...
URRNG
WOW
OW

THAT MAN HAD HAD AN AFFAIR WITH HIS MASTER'S WIFE. HE'D EVEN TRIED TO MOLEST HANZO'S WIFE. HE HAD BEEN ABOUT TO JAM HIS PENIS INSIDE TSUKUMO ONCE.
SO THOUGHT HANZŌ. AND YET, A STRONG DESIRE TO KILL UJIZANE POSSESSED HIM, AND HE COULD NOT HELP GRIPPING A *KUNAI* IN HIS HAND.
I HAVE NEWS.
BUT HANZŌ RESTRAINED HIMSELF.

AND FROM WHAT I HEAR, ODA'S FORCES ARE ON THE MOVE, AS IF IN RESPONSE.
SUPPA FROM MIKAWA ARE STARTING FIRES EVERYWHERE AROUND THE CASTLE.
...AND STORM SUNPU STRAIGHT OUT.
WE SUSPECT IEYASU'S MEN WILL LEAVE OKAZAKI AND JOIN FORCES WITH ODA...
N... NO! THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
WHA... WHA...?

RUMOR HAS IT THEY'RE IN COLLUSION.
ABOUT THAT UPRISING IN MIKAWA...
BESIDES, IEYASU IS PUTTING DESPERATE EFFORTS INTO SUPPRESSING THE IKKŌ-IKKI.
NOBUNAGA IS INVADING MINŌ RIGHT NOW!
EYEING SUNPU, ODA AND IEYASU ARE USING THIS TRICK TO LOWER OUR GUARD, IS WHAT I HEAR.
WHA... WHAT?!
NOBUNAGA AND IEYASU ARE NO THREAT! I'LL SEND MY MEN AND DRIVE THEM AWAY!
MMNG!
SEEING WHAT'S TAKING PLACE NOW, IT MUST BE TRUE AFTER ALL.

MILORD!
GOOD.

FOOL! THE SUPPA OF MIKAWA DID IT.
I'M HAVING MY MEN INVESTIGATE THE CAUSE.
THE FIRE IS NOW UNDER CONTROL.
WHA...?
BUT THERE'S NO PROOF.
INDEED, RUMOR SAYS SUPPA OF MIKAWA LIT THE FIRE.
B... BUT IEYASU AND NOBUNAGA ARE LEADING THEIR MEN TO SUNPU... I HEAR...
THERE'S A CHANCE THE ARSONS THEMSELVES SHOUTED THAT STORY, SO WE SHOULD CONDUCT A THOROUGH INVESTIGATION.

HMM...
HM?! BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM BEFORE...
THE MAN WHO LEFT WHEN YOU CAME IN...
WHO TOLD YOU THAT?
HUH?!
EXCUSE ME!
GAK!

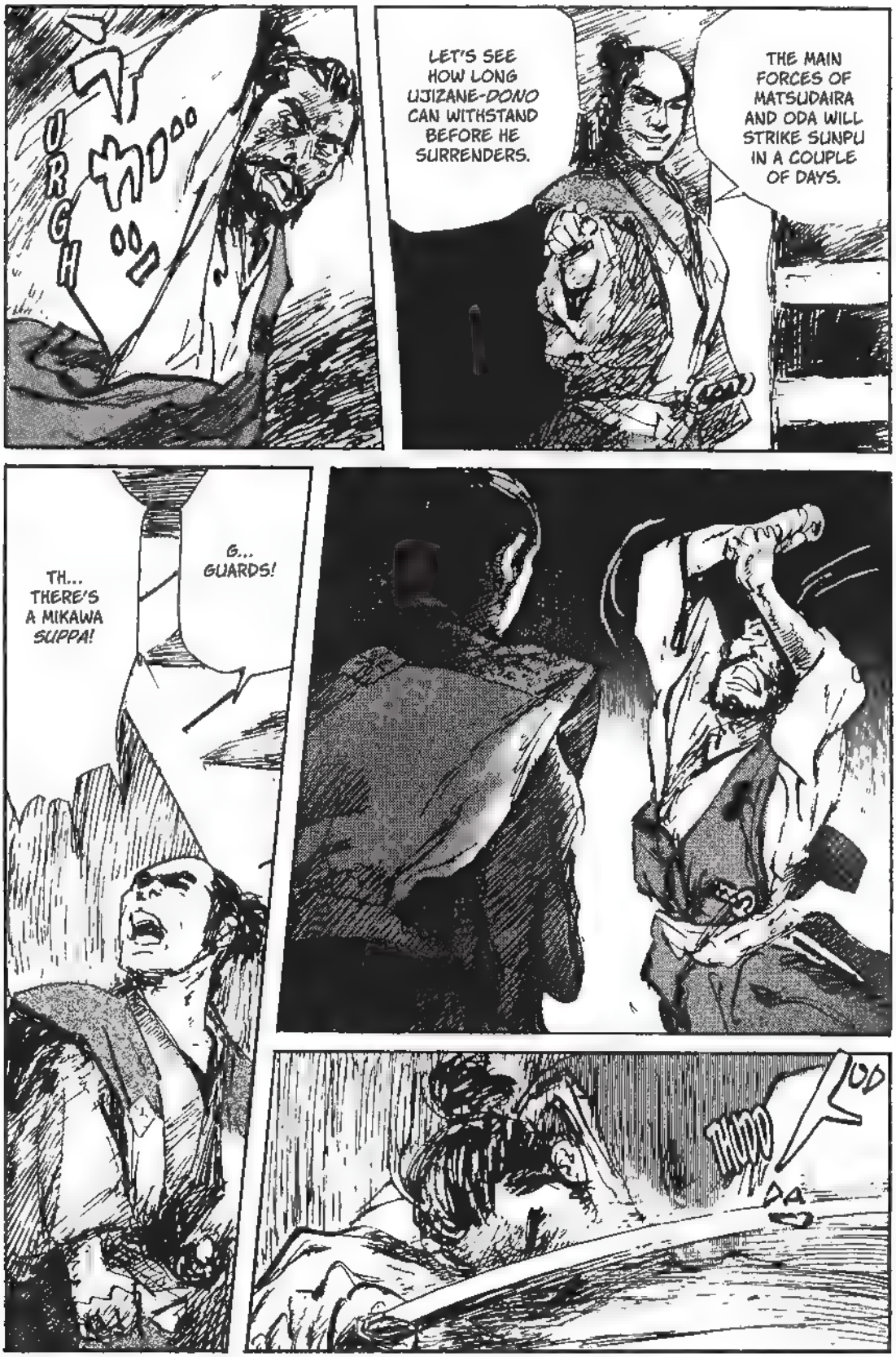
YOU!

UGH!
NNNG!

I AM IEYASU'S VASSAL, HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI.
ARE... ARE YOU... A MIKAWA... SUPPA?
URRK!
BUT I CHANGED MY MIND.
I SNUCK INTO SUNPU IN ADVANCE AND STARTED THE FIRE. WHILE YOU WERE IN DISARRAY, I MEANT TO TAKE UJIZANE-DONO'S HEAD.

BYUN
KA!

....
....
BECAUSE.
IF HE'S DEAD, SOMEONE ELSE WILL BE DIRECTING YOUR ARMY. HEH HEH HEH.
KEEPING HIM ALIVE WILL MAKE THE WAR EASIER TO WIN. HEH HEH HEH.
NOTHING IS AS PROMISING AND REASSURING AS HAVING UJIZANE-*DONO* COMMAND HIS OWN ARMY. HEH HEH HEH.
AFTER WATCHING HIM PANIC, I CONCLUDED HE IS AS DENSE AS RUMOR HAS HIM.


URGH
LET'S SEE HOW LONG UJIZANE-DONO CAN WITHSTAND BEFORE HE SURRENDERS.
THE MAIN FORCES OF MATSUDAIRA AND ODA WILL STRIKE SUNPU IN A COUPLE OF DAYS.
TH... THERE'S A MIKAWA SUPPA!
G... GUARDS!

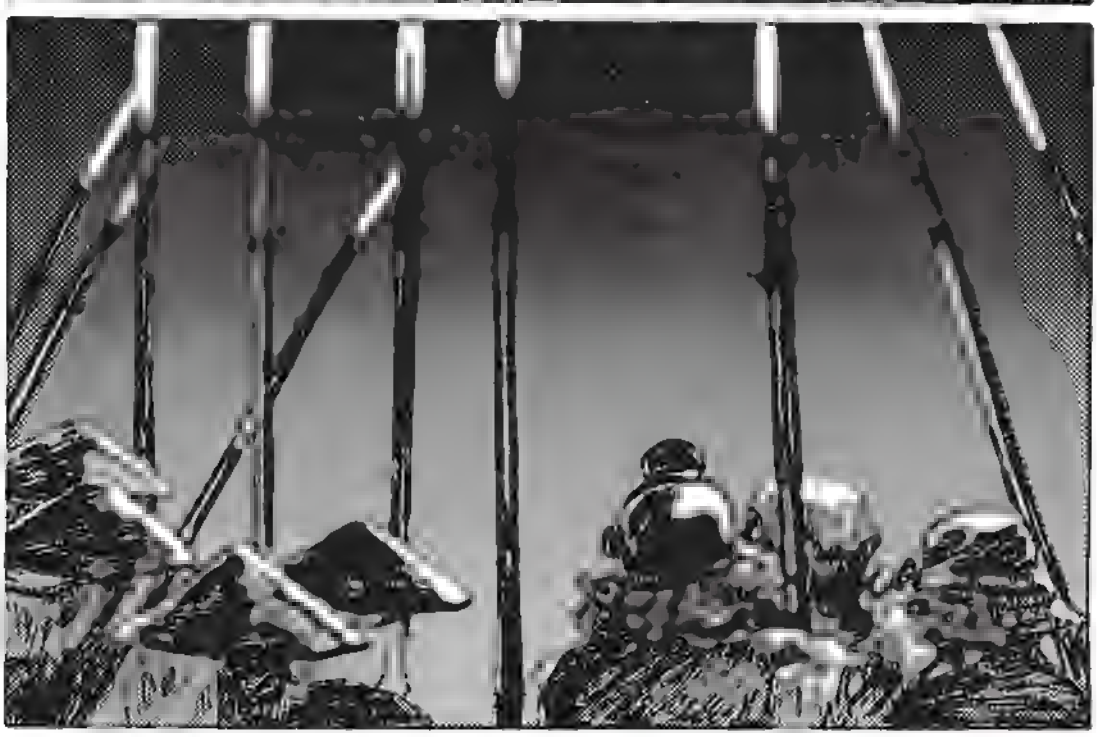
I STRUCK HIS THROAT WITH *KUNAI* SO HE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SHOUT. BUT HE CAN STILL WHISPER. HIS JOB IS TO TELL UJIZANE WHAT I SAID.
SIMP
SIMP
SIMP
GAIKI!
MM!! WHAT THE!!

B...
BITTER
DEFEAT!
A SUPPA...
UNDER IEYASU'S
CONTROL...
NAMED...
HA...
HATTORI
HANZŌ...
WHO DID
THIS TO
YOU,
GAIKI?
SUCH A
DISGUSTING
REMARK!
HE SAID HE
WOULDN'T TAKE
YOUR HEAD, MILORD...
BECAUSE YOU ARE
SO DENSE...
THAT IT'S EASIER
TO WIN THE WAR
WITH YOU
IN COMMAND.
GUARD EVERY
ENTRANCE
AND EXIT!
A MIKAWA
SUPPA SNUCK
HIS WAY IN!
HNNG!
MAKE SURE NOT
EVEN AN ANT CAN
CRAWL OUT!!

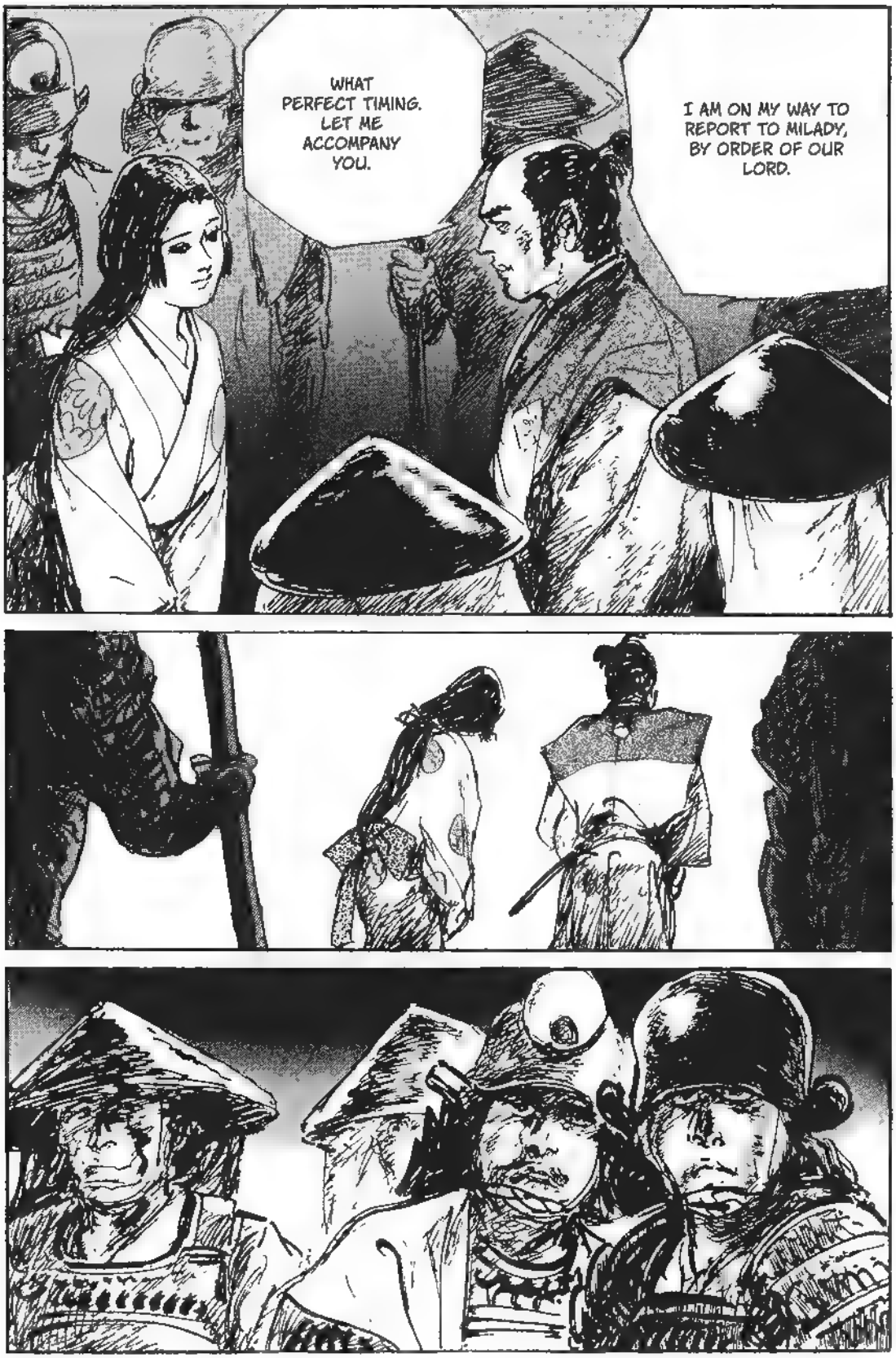
CALL EVERYONE TO BATTLE!!
IN ADDITION, THE MAIN FORCES OF MATSUDAIRA AND ODA... WOULD ATTACK SUNPU IN A COUPLE OF DAYS.
I'LL BRING ALL MY MEN AND ASSAIL BOTH IEYASU AND NOBUNAGA! I'LL CUT THEIR HEADS OFF!
I TOLD YOU ALL I HEARD BECAUSE I BELIEVE IT'S A LIE. I THINK... IT'S A TRICK TO LURE YOU OUT OF SUNPU AND GET YOU TO INVADE MIKAWA.
P... PLEASE WAIT... IT'S... IT'S A LIE.
WHA... WHAT...?

IT BACKFIRED...
I BET IEYASU WILL ENGAGE YOU, AND NOBUNAGA WILL STORM SUNPU WHILE ITS DEFENSES ARE LIGHT.
IF YOU TAKE THE BAIT, MATSUDAIRA AND ODA WILL SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY AND SANDWICH YOU, MILORD.

...LEAVE... SUNPU.
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS... YOU MUST NOT...
MILORD! YOU MUST NOT LEAVE!
I BOTCHED IT... I HAVE TO BACK OUT AND COME UP WITH ANOTHER PLAN OF ACTION.
EVEN AFTER THEY LOST SO MANY GENERALS, THERE IS STILL A MAN AS REMARKABLE AS THAT ONE.
NO WONDER IMAGAWA WAS FEARED AS THE GREAT LEADER OF TŌKAI.



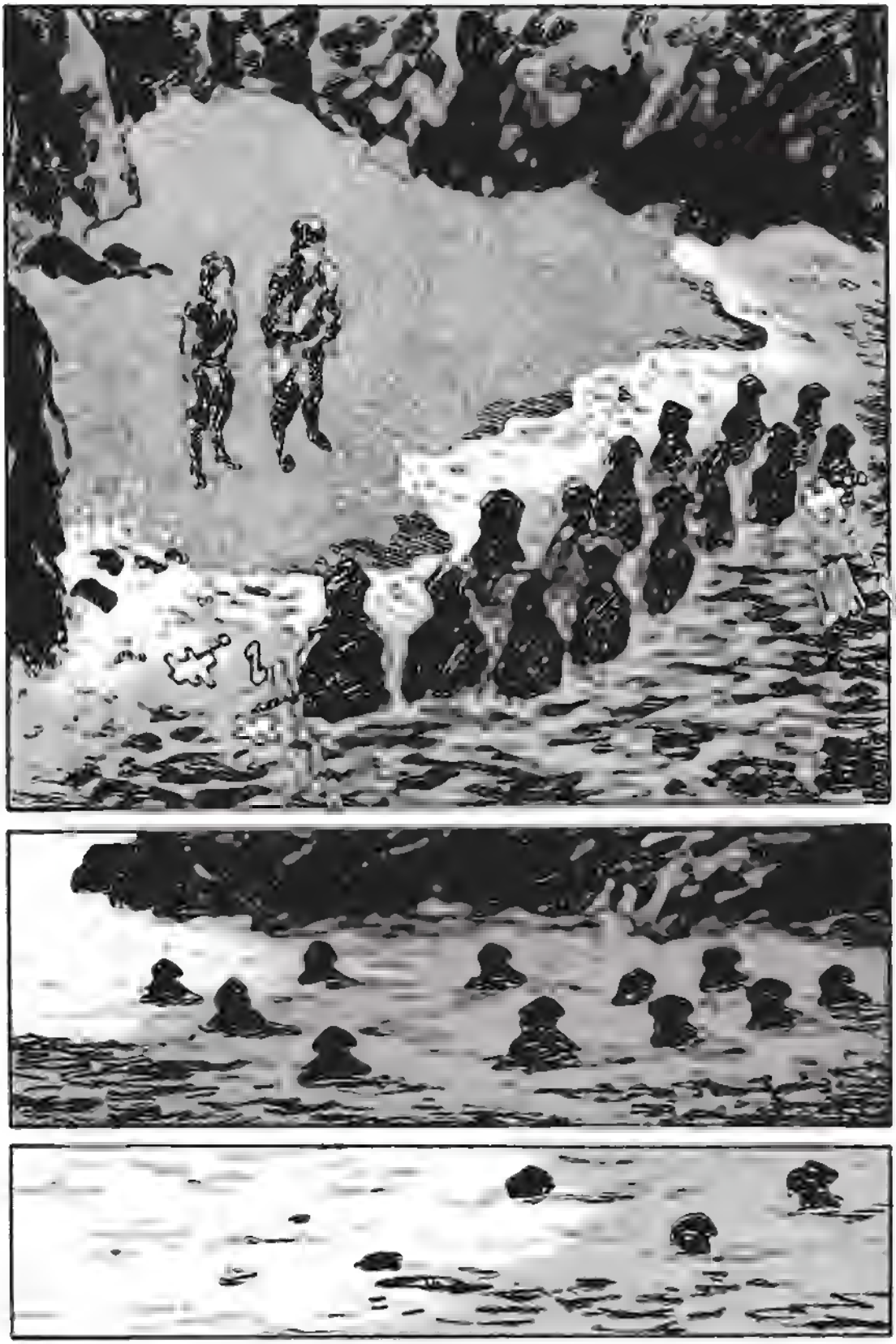
WITH ALL THE FIRE AND THE NOISE, SHE IS ANXIOUS TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON, AND SHE ASKED ME TO GO LOOK AROUND.
I AM KAEDE, MILADY'S HANDMAIDEN.
OH, IS THAT RIGHT?

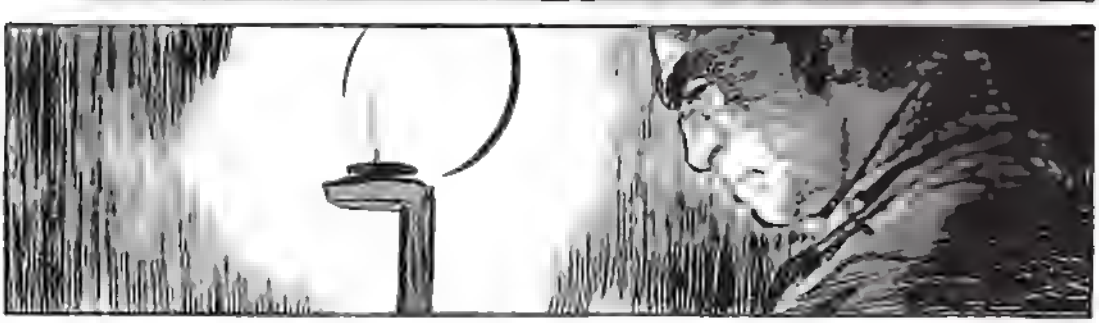

WHAT PERFECT TIMING. LET ME ACCOMPANY YOU.
I AM ON MY WAY TO REPORT TO MILADY, BY ORDER OF OUR LORD.

LET'S FLY, TSUKUMO. WE MUST START AFRESH.

...FAILED.
OUR ATTEMPT TO PROVOKE UJIZANE TO RAISE AN ARMY AND INVADE MIKAWA...

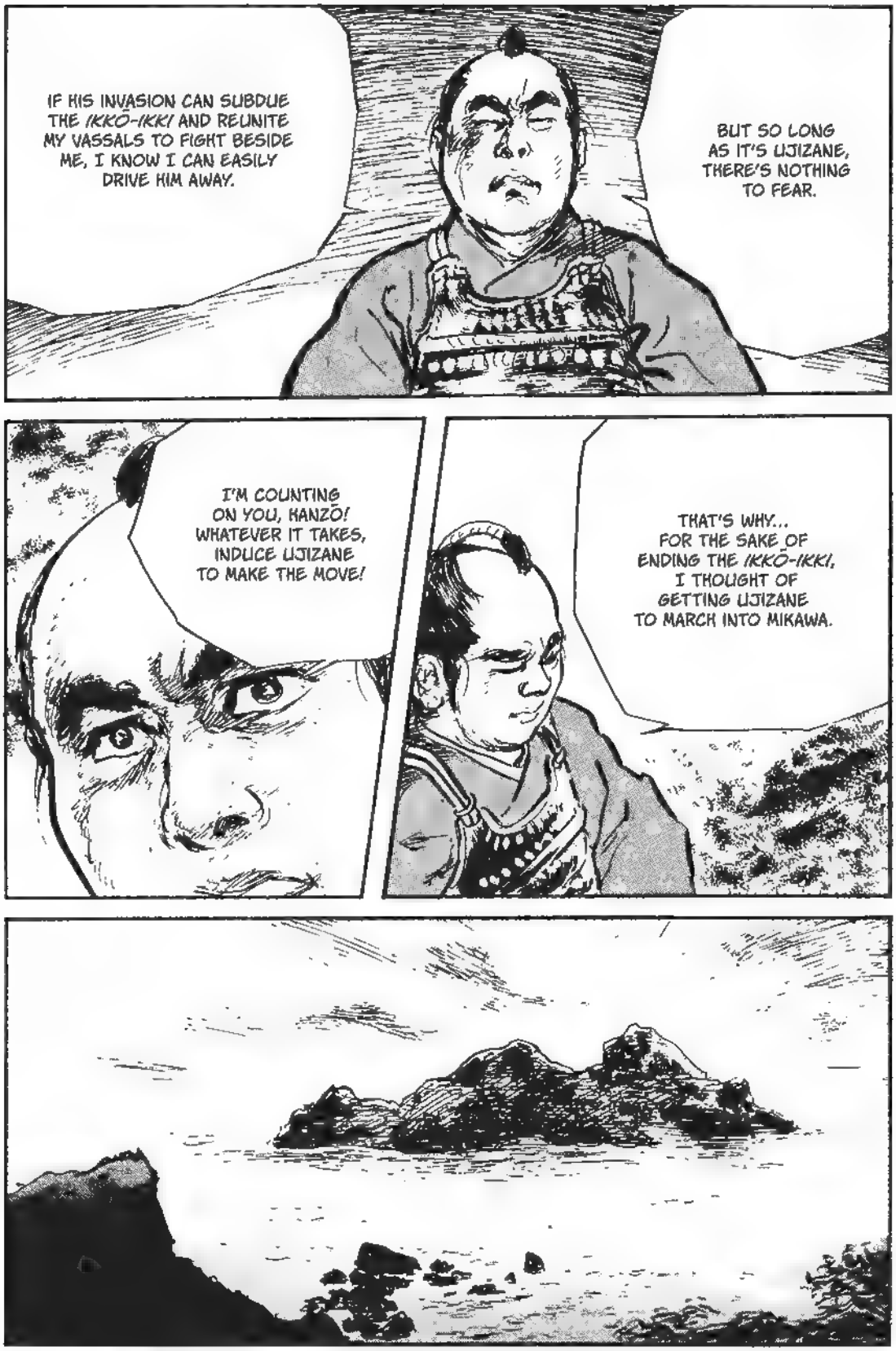
ZAZAA
UJIZANE WON'T MAKE THE MOVE. THAT MEANS, WITHOUT A SIGNIFICANT TURN OF EVENTS, A SUPPA'S TECHNIQUES WON'T WORK.
ZAAAA
...SCATTER AWAY! GO BACK TO THE BORDER AND WAIT FOR MY SIGNAL.
UNTIL WE COME UP WITH A CLEVER PLAN...
ZAAAA
NOKIZARU, THE IMAGAWA'S SUPPA, MUST HAVE ASSEMBLED AND BEEN GIVEN ORDERS TO HUNT US DOWN BY NOW. SO BE VERY CAREFUL!
ZAAAA
ZAAAA

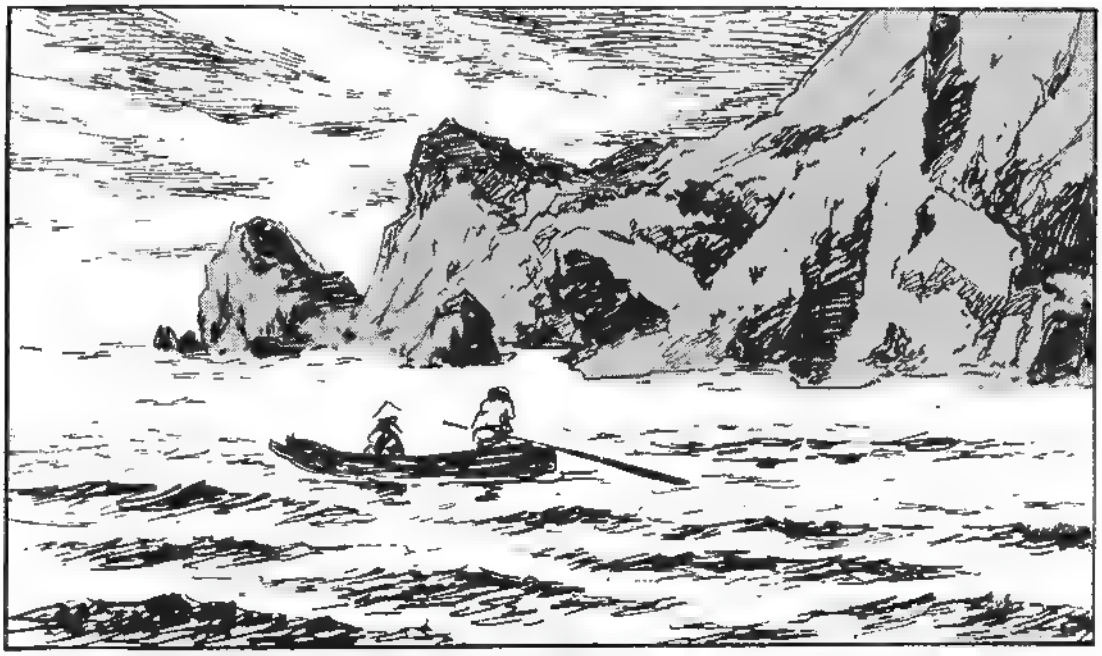


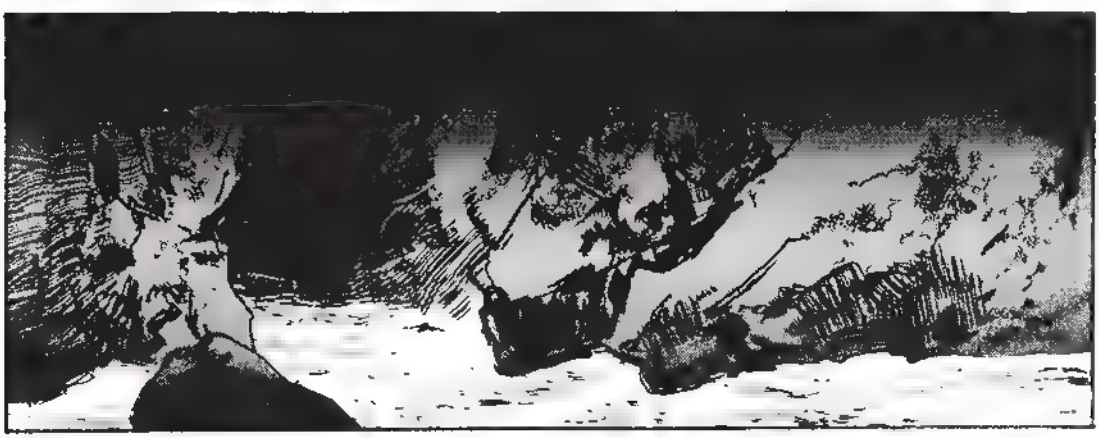


IT'S... TRULY PAINFUL.
IT'S PAINFUL.
...AND WHEN THEY ADVANCE, WE PULL AWAY.
WHEN WE ATTACK, THE REBELS DRAW BACK...
KNOWING THAT, THEY SWARM BACK AGAIN.
I HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE... IF WE CRASH, MANY OF MY VASSALS WILL END UP DEAD.

EVERYONE... IS EXHAUSTED.
IT'S LIKE A WAR BETWEEN WIND AND WAVE... WHO KNOWS WHEN IT WILL EVER END.
WELL, IF HE WAS LIKE ME, I WOULD'VE HAD TO THINK HARDER.
IF I WERE UJIZANE... I WOULD'VE INVADED THE MOMENT THE IKKŌ-IKKI STARTED...
MAKE UJIZANE ATTACK MIKAWA! WE HAVE NO DAYS TO LOSE!
HANZŌ. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!


IF HIS INVASION CAN SUBDUE THE IKKŌ-IKKI AND REUNITE MY VASSALS TO FIGHT BESIDE ME, I KNOW I CAN EASILY DRIVE HIM AWAY.
BUT SO LONG AS IT'S UJIZANE, THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR.
I'M COUNTING ON YOU, HANZŌ! WHATEVER IT TAKES, INDUCE UJIZANE TO MAKE THE MOVE!
THAT'S WHY... FOR THE SAKE OF ENDING THE IKKŌ-IKKI, I THOUGHT OF GETTING UJIZANE TO MARCH INTO MIKAWA.





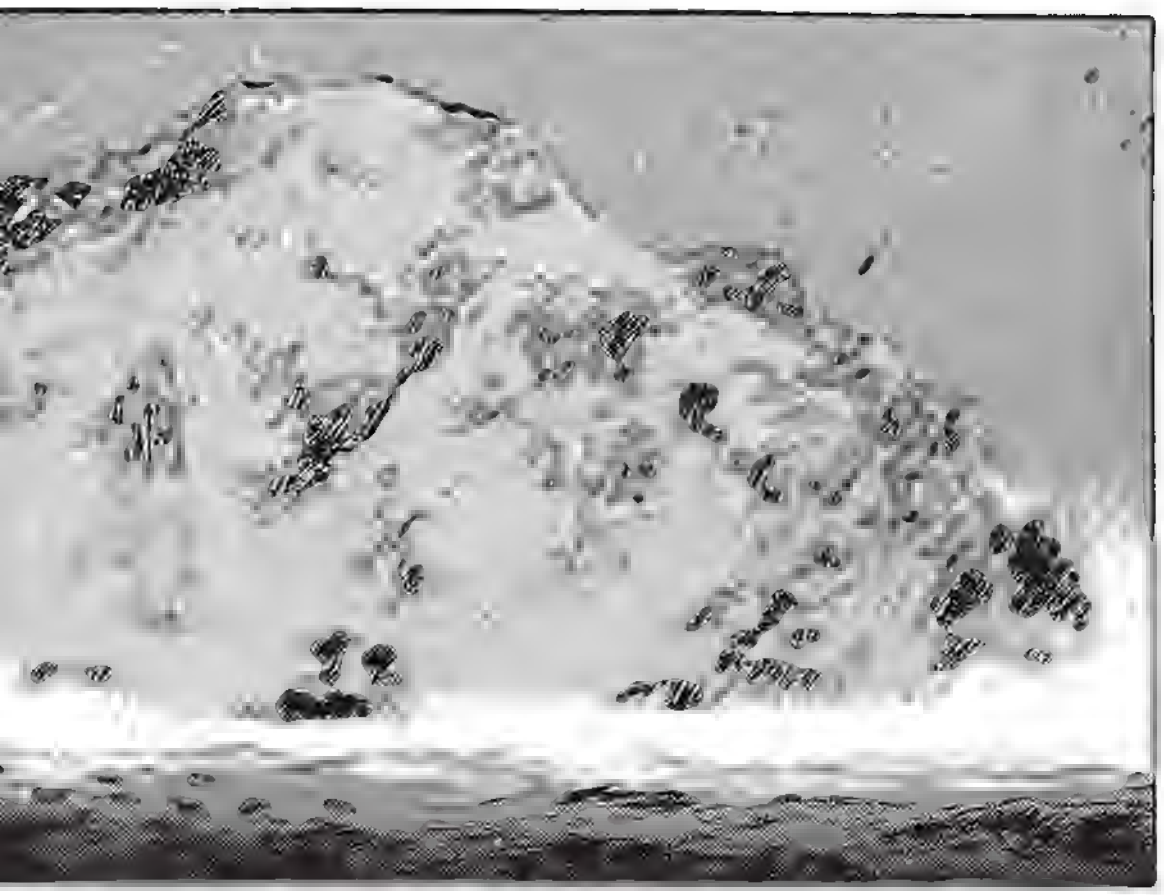
YOU'RE THINKING OF GETTING SHINGEN-*SAMA* TO ACT.
THERE IS ONE.
NO MATTER HOW I RACK MY BRAIN... THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO.
BECAUSE THEN, UJIZANE WILL HAVE TO MAKE HIS MOVE, AND NOBUNAGA WILL TOO. THE *IKKŌ-IKKI* MAY END, BUT...
IF THE TIGER OF KAI WERE TO STRIKE US, THAT'S MORE WORRISOME THAN THE *IKKŌ-IKKI*.
Y... YES.
BUT... HE SAID HE WOULD HELP IF SOMETHING CAME UP.
THE OUTCOME WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO GUESS.
...IT'S SCARY.

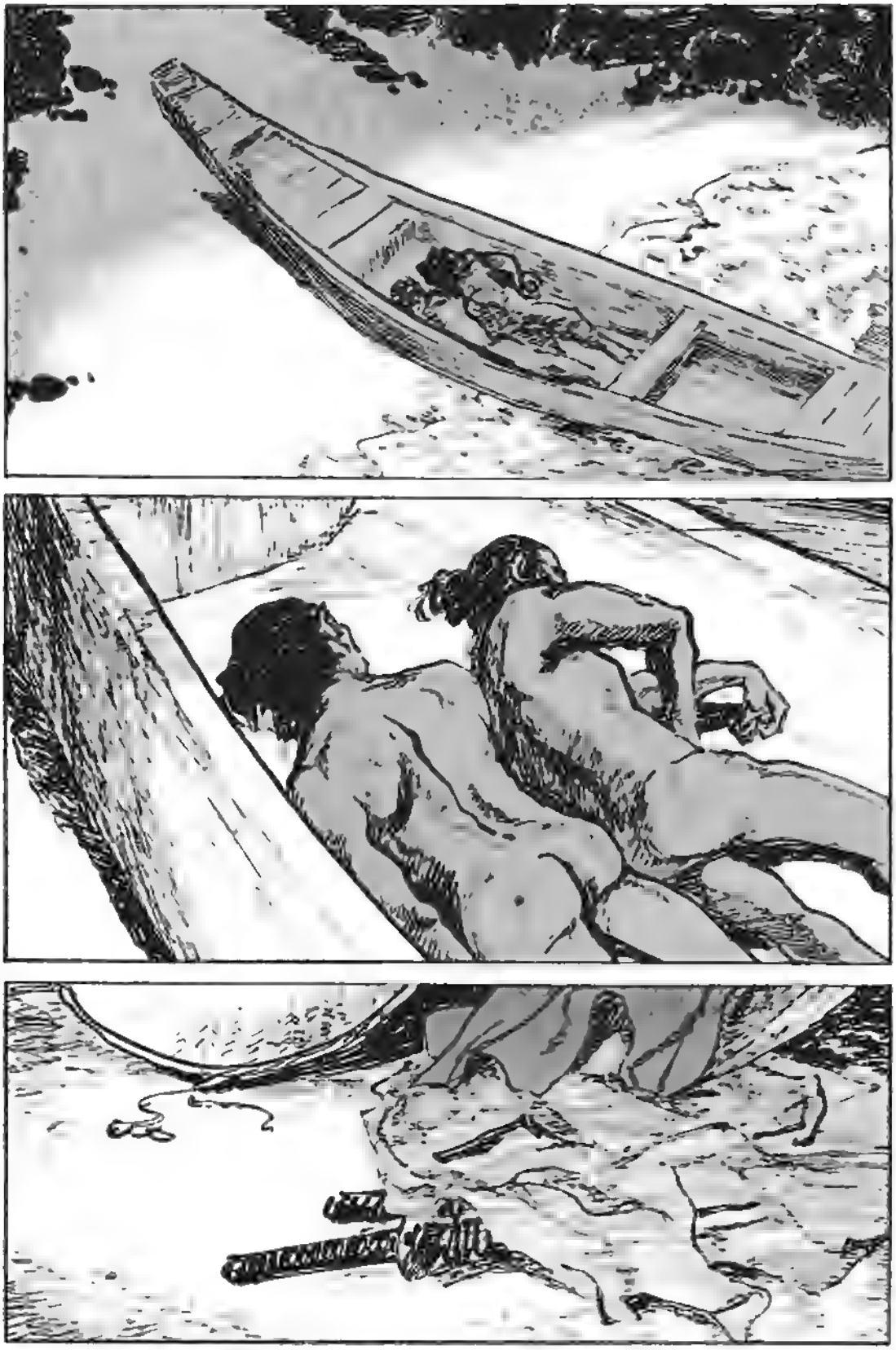
BUT HE'LL ALSO MAKE US PROMISE THAT MIKAWA MATSUDAIRA WILL COME UNDER TAKEDA'S CONTROL
HE WILL CERTAINLY EXTEND HIS HELP, IF IT'S A REQUEST FROM US OR FROM OUR MASTER
I THOUGHT IT WAS FREEZING IT'S SNOWING
MA!? A BOAT!

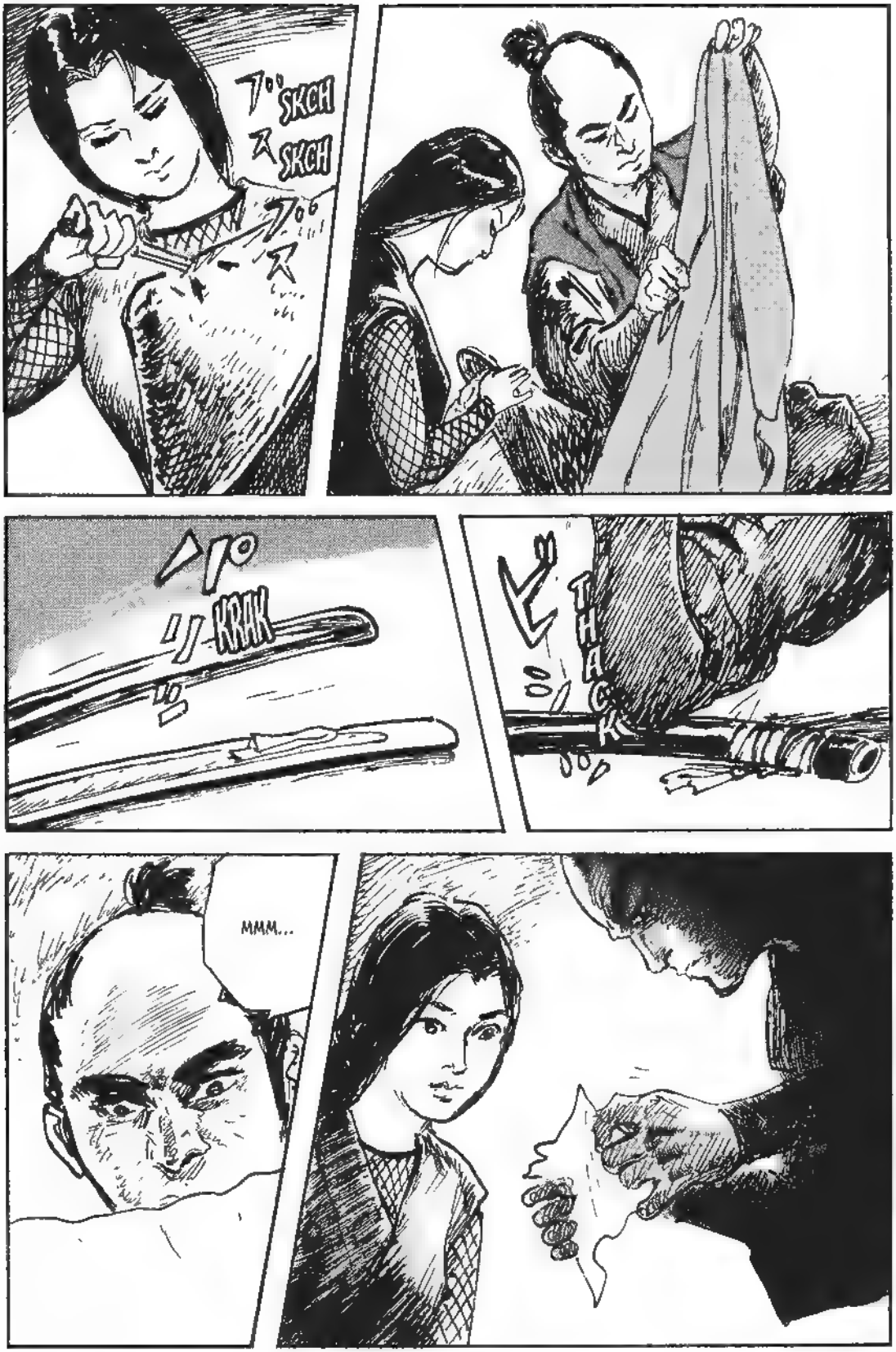
AT SEA IN THIS SNOW... AND A *SAMURAI*. IT'S STRANGE.
CREAK
CREAK

I AM TANIMURA SHINPACHIRO, A VASSAL OF SAKAI SHOGEN TADAHISA, THE LORD OF UENO CASTLE IN MIKAWA. I BROUGHT A LETTER WRITTEN BY MY LORD TO UJIZANE-SAMA.
WHO ARE YOU?
I AM A NOKIZARU OF IMAGAWA. IT IS MY DUTY TO QUESTION YOU.
BLOCK!
THUK
I'M NOT A NOKIZARU I AM HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI I'M A MIKAWA SAMURAI LIKE YOU!!
WHA...?

GAK.
AS I THOUGHT, TADAHISA-*SAMA* IS IN COMMUNICATION WITH IMAGAWA.
OH, I HAVE AN IDEA! THERE'S A GREAT WAY TO PRESS UJIZANE!





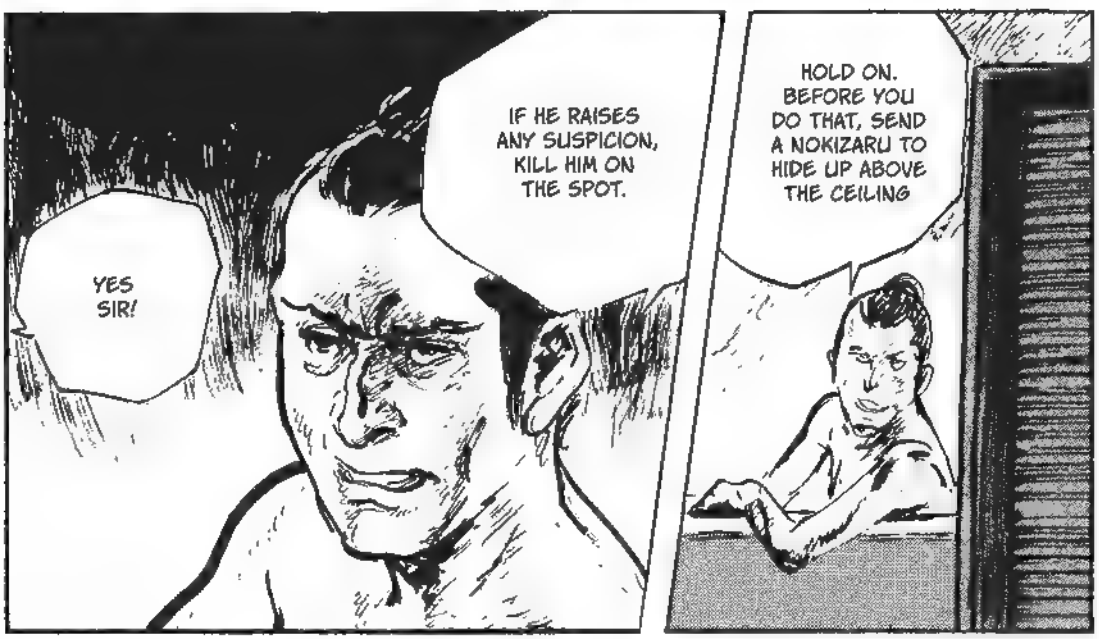

SKCH
SKCH
KRAK
THACK
MMM...

A DRINK!
THE STEAM DOESN'T LAST EVEN IN HERE. THAT SHOWS HOW FREEZING IT IS.

WHO WOULD'VE THOUGHT IT WOULD SNOW THIS SOON.
IN SUNPU, IT SHOULD SNOW ONLY ON MT. FUJI! IF THE GROUND GETS COVERED, I WON'T BE ABLE TO PLAY *KEMARI*.

WHAT IS IT?
MILORD

IT'S TOO COLD TO GET OUT. BRING HIM IN HERE.
TANIMURA SHINPACHIRŌ, AN ENVOY OF SAKAI TADAHISA-*SAMA*, HAS JUST ARRIVED.
YES, SIR.


IF HE RAISES ANY SUSPICION, KILL HIM ON THE SPOT.
YES SIR!
HOLD ON. BEFORE YOU DO THAT, SEND A NOKIZARU TO HIDE UP ABOVE THE CEILING

I AM TANIMURA SHINPACHIRŌ, A VASSAL OF SAKAI TADAHISA. IT'S AN HONOR TO SEE YOU IN PERSON...
YES SIR.
IT'S COLD. COME IN AND SHUT THE DOOR.

OPEN IT SO I CAN READ IT.
I BROUGHT A LETTER FROM MY LORD, TADAHISA.
SO THE IKKŌ-IKKI WILL DESTROY IEYASU... "THE INSURGENTS ARE INCREASING IN POWER EVERY DAY, EVEN THOUGH THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE PROGRESS IN TERMS OF THE WAR...
HM.

SO, YOU ARE... TANIMURA?
WELL, IF YOUR SIDE WINS, I WOULDN'T MIND GIVING MIKAWA TO TADAHISA...
HMPH. HE WRITES NOTHING NEW.
"BUT DEFINITELY, BY THE TIME NEW YEAR'S ROLLS AROUND, WE WILL HAVE A GOOD ADVANTAGE..."
WHAT DO YOU THINK WAS THEIR OBJECTIVE?
ARE YOU AWARE THAT MIKAWA *SUPPA* RAN RAMPANT IN MY CASTLE AND SET FIRE TO THE STOREHOUSES?
YES SIR.
YES. I JUST HEARD ABOUT IT.

I'M HONORED, SIR.
GOOD GUESS. NO WONDER YOU WERE CHOSEN AS A SECRET ENVOY. I WAS THINKING THE SAME.
I BELIEVE THEY WANTED YOU, SIR, TO ATTACK MIKAWA.
HE'S TEARING HIS FLESH AND CHIPPING AWAY HIS BONES. HE'S DESPERATE TO UNITE THE MIKAWA *SAMURAI*. THAT'S WHY IT'S DANGEROUS.
UNDER ORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES, IT WOULD BE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO INVADE MIKAWA WHILE YOU ARE IN THE MIDST OF THE *IKKŌ-IKKI*.
BUT I BET IEYASU IS HOPING I WILL MARCH IN, INTERRUPT THE REBELLION AND SPUR HIS VASSALS TO REJOIN HIM.
AND THAT'S WHY I CAN'T INVADE THOUGHTLESSLY. TADAHISA MUST THINK SO, TOO, BECAUSE HE DIDN'T MENTION MY POSSIBLE INVASION. HE DIDN'T EVEN HINT AT IT.

UH-HUH.
MAY I BURN THIS NOW?
YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY CORRECT.

YES.
GO BACK AND INFORM TADAHISA...
FOR YOU, SIR, TO ALLOW MY AUDIENCE AS YOU BATHE PROVES HOW MUCH YOU TRUST MY LORD. I WILL RETURN...
...THAT I SAID SO AS I BATHED.

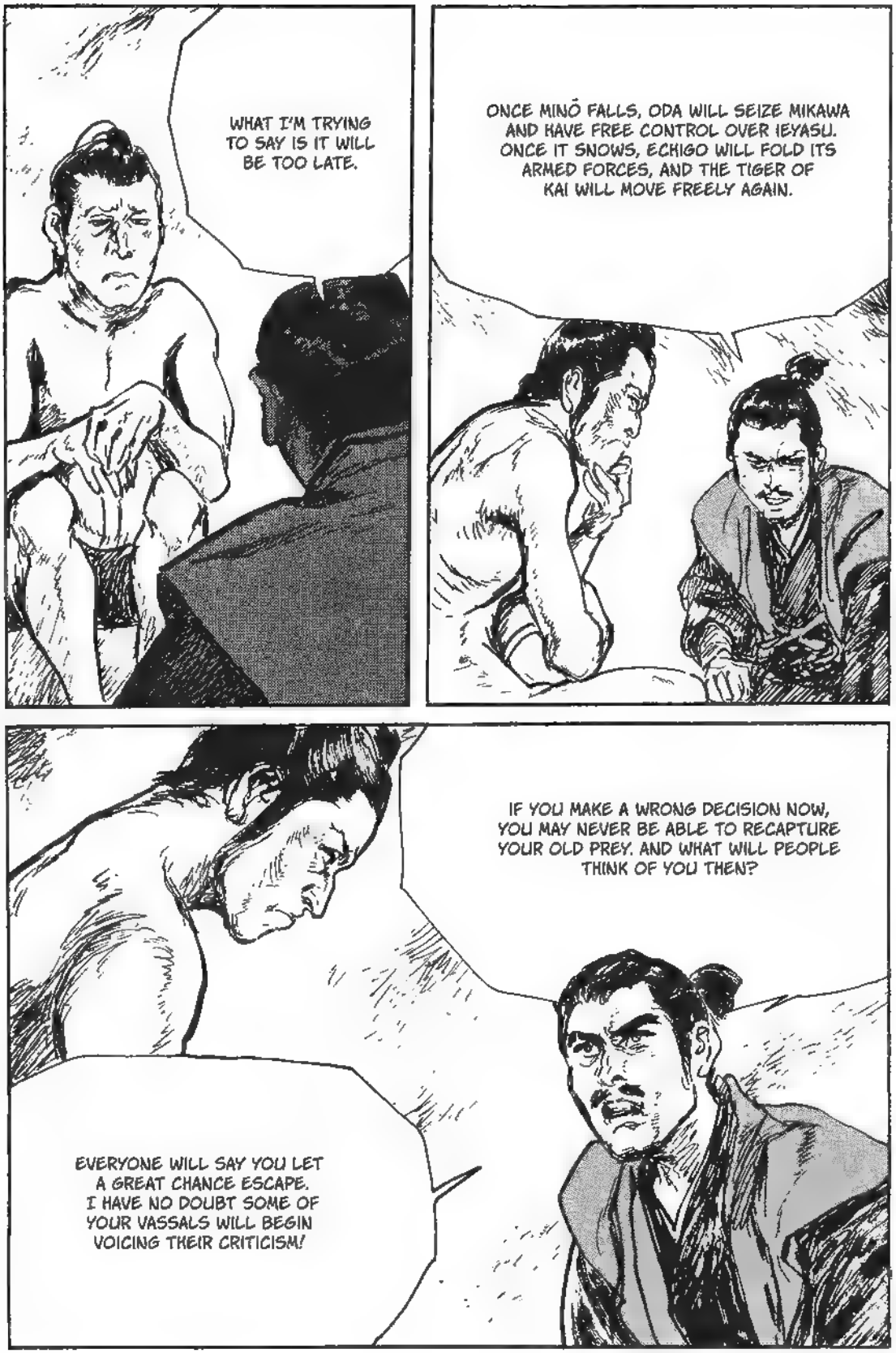
YOU GOT IT.
...HOW SHARP YOU ARE, TANIMURA. HO HO HO HO HO HO HO.
...AND TELL HIM.
I STILL BELIEVE IT'S BEST TO STRIKE MIKAWA RIGHT NOW.
WHAT?
SIR.
...IT'S AS IF THINGS ARE SAGGING HERE IN SUNPU.
AFTER YOSHIMOTO-KŌ PASSED AWAY...
HUH?!

I MEAN, IT'S LIKE THE BACKBONE IS CROOKED.
WHA... WHAT?!
BECAUSE YOU OBSERVED THAT I AM SHARP, I'M SAYING THIS, KNOWING IT MAY COST MY LIFE.

WHY DO BEASTS STARVE WHEN WINTER ARRIVES?
IF THEY HAD A MIND TO STORE THEIR FOOD, THEY WOULDN'T GO HUNGRY.
IT'S BECAUSE THEY DON'T EXPECT THEIR FOOD TO DISAPPEAR.

SIR.
ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME THAT... THAT... FOOD WILL DISAPPEAR FROM SUNPU?
NOT ONLY THAT, IT IS PREY THAT YOU LET GO.
MIKAWA WAS IMAGAWA'S PREY.
IT SITS SNUG OUT OF YOUR REACH. WHAT DO YOU THINK YOSHIMOTO-KŌ MIGHT FEEL ABOUT THAT IN THE NETHERWORLD?

THAT'S WHY I'M HAVING TADAKISA LEAD THE *IKKŌ-IKKI* TO SHAKE UP MIKAWA!
THEREFORE, NOW IS THE PERFECT CHANCE TO RECAPTURE YOUR PREY!
ODA IS TOO TIED UP IN INVADING MINŌ TO DO ANYTHING ELSE. TAKEDA IS BOLTED DOWN, BECAUSE THEY MUST KEEP ECHIGO IN CHECK.
THAT'S NOT ENOUGH!
THE LONGER THE *IKKŌ-IKKI* LASTS, THE MORE FAVORABLE THE SITUATION WILL BECOME FOR THE OTHER BEASTS!


WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY IS IT WILL BE TOO LATE.
ONCE MINŌ FALLS, ODA WILL SEIZE MIKAWA AND HAVE FREE CONTROL OVER IEYASU. ONCE IT SNOWS, ECHIGO WILL FOLD ITS ARMED FORCES, AND THE TIGER OF KAI WILL MOVE FREELY AGAIN.
IF YOU MAKE A WRONG DECISION NOW, YOU MAY NEVER BE ABLE TO RECAPTURE YOUR OLD PREY. AND WHAT WILL PEOPLE THINK OF YOU THEN?
EVERYONE WILL SAY YOU LET A GREAT CHANCE ESCAPE. I HAVE NO DOUBT SOME OF YOUR VASSALS WILL BEGIN VOICING THEIR CRITICISM!

TO SIT AND WAIT?! WHAT AN EGREGIOUS FOLLY THAT IS! UNLESS YOU SHOOT AT A BIRD, IT WILL NEVER FALL DOWN.
EVEN WITHOUT IT, YOU ARE ALWAYS COMPARED TO YOSHIMOTO-KŌ AND WEIGHED AGAINST HIM.
IF YOU DON'T CATCH THE PREY WHILE YOU CAN, YOU'RE NO DIFFERENT FROM A BEAST. YOU WILL STARVE SOMEDAY.
THAT'S WHY I FEEL THAT THE BACKBONE ISN'T STRAIGHT. THERE'S NO PILLAR THAT STANDS FIRM HERE.
IF YOU DO, YOUR MEN WILL PRAISE YOU AND SUPPORT YOU WITH A FORCE THAT COULD TAKE DOWN THE HEAVENS.
I'M TELLING THIS FOR YOUR SAKE, SIR, THAT NOW IS THE MOMENT TO STRIKE MIKAWA.
AND THAT TYPE OF MORALE IS WHAT IMAGAWA NEEDS TODAY TO DEMONSTRATE ITS FORTITUDE.

I...
WHY HESITATE?!
SWARK
Y... YOU SPOKE WELL, TANIMURA!
I SEE YOUR POINT! Y... YOU'RE RIGHT!

WE WILL INVADE MIKAWA! TAKE UP ARMS!
MEN!! EVERYONE!
ATTACK MIKAWA!
SMP
SMP
SMP
SMP

THAT IEYASU! I WILL MAKE HIM PAY AFTER ALL MY YEARS OF HOLDING A GRUDGE!!
THE *IKKŌ-IKKI* HAS WEAKENED THEM COMPLETELY. NOW IS OUR GREATEST CHANCE!
WE'RE GOING TO WAR!

YES, MILORD.
I WILL GO BACK IMMEDIATELY AND TELL TADAHISA-SAMA.
DID IT?
YES SIR!
GOOD! HURRY HOME, TANIMIRA. YOU DID WELL.

HM!
YOU ARE...
IT'S NO USE, HANZŌ.

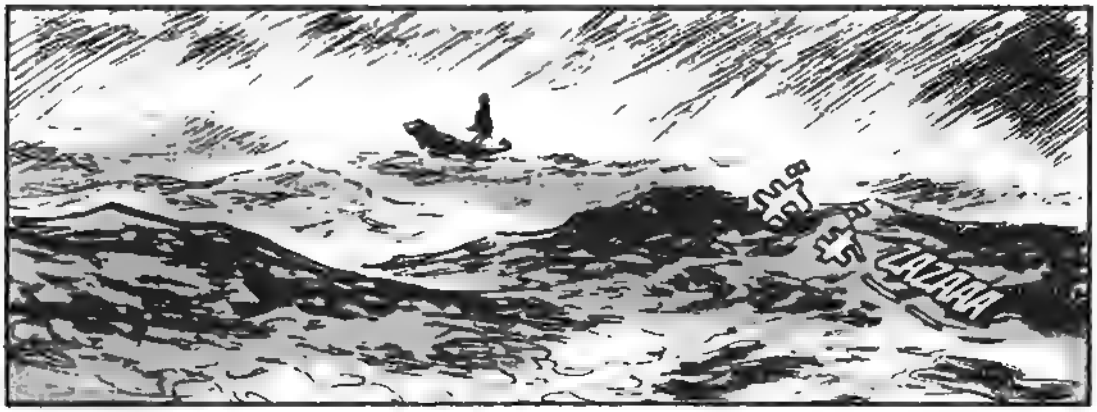
TŌMA ENŌ. I MET YOU ONCE BEFORE.
KUNAI WON'T WORK AGAINST ME. HEH HEH HEH.
BUT YOU SURE BAMBOOZLED UJIZANE.
I SAID IT'S NO USE.
I WILL SIMPLY GET AWAY. I'M NOT HERE TO FIGHT. YOU'D END UP WASTING YOUR TIME.

URK...
I WORK FOR IMAGAWA AS THEIR *NOKIZARU* NOW. I WAS HIDING ABOVE THE CEILING OF THE BATH CHAMBER.
WHY WOULD YOU?!
WHAT IF I GO AND TELL UJIZANE?
HEH HEH HEH. YOU SPOKE TOO WELL FOR A VASSAL OF TADAHISA. NO *MATAMONO* TALKS THAT WELL. THAT'S WHY I FOLLOWED YOU.
I SAW HOW YOU HID TADAHISA'S LETTER INSTEAD OF BURNING IT.
THAT'S ALL.
I WANT A WOMAN.
WHAT DO YOU WANT?!

A WOMAN WHO'D LIVE WITH ME. WILL YOU GET ME ONE?
I'LL TAKE YOURS, IF YOU WANT.
I'M LONELY, HANZO.

IN THIS WORLD, YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO'S REALLY SEEN ME.
MAYBE BECAUSE YOU'VE SEEN MY FACE, I FEEL KIND OF CLOSE TO YOU.
ZAZAAAN

EVERYONE ELSE DIED, YOU SEE.
ZAZAAAN
I'VE ALREADY WORKED ENOUGH FOR THE MONEY THEY PAID.
I'M A HIRED *SUPPA*. I SELL MY SKILL FOR MONEY. RIGHT NOW, I'M WORKING FOR IMAGAWA, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN I WILL DO THEM ANY FAVORS.
ZAZAAAN

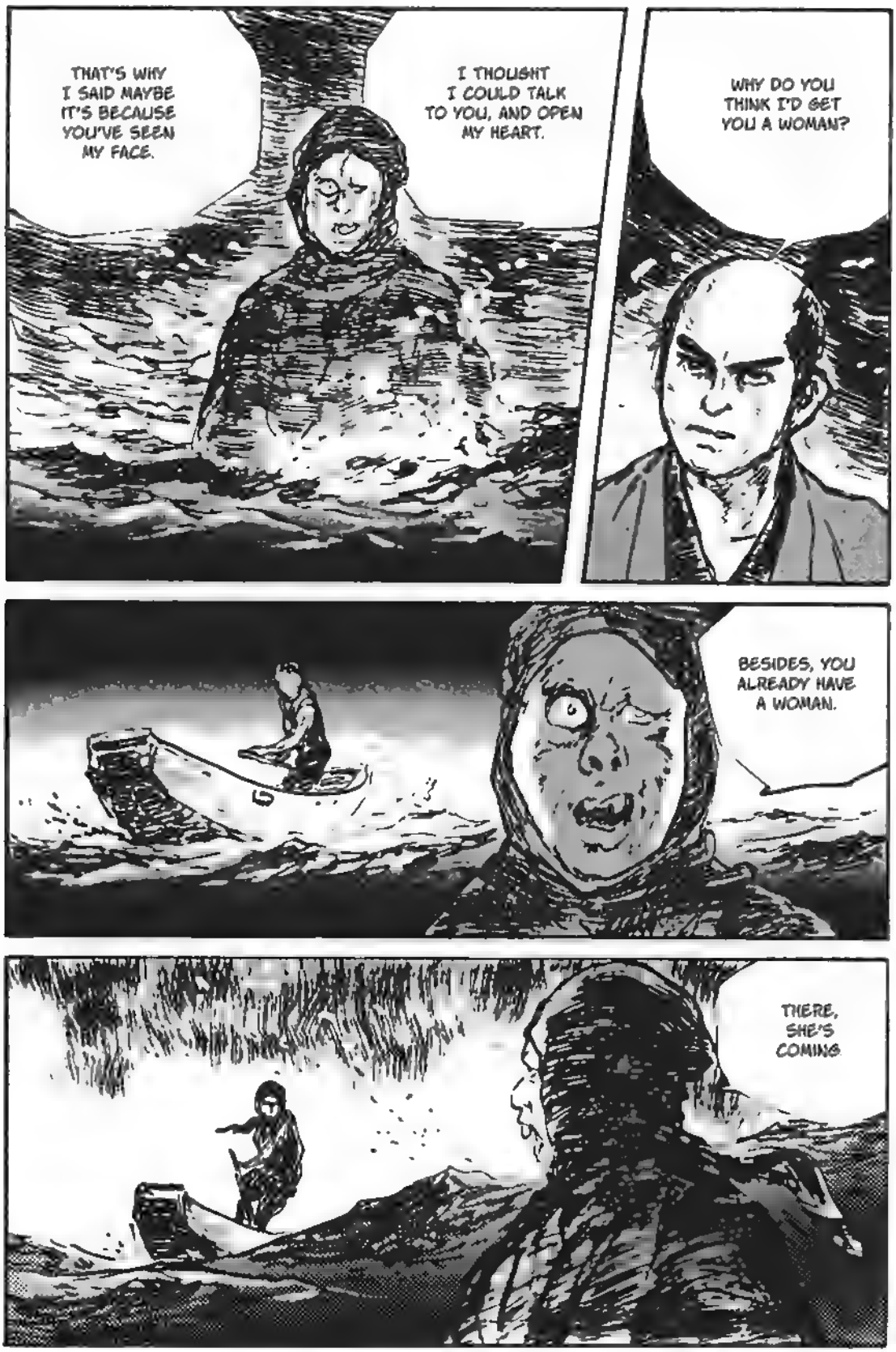

ZAZAAA

WHY DON'T YOU GO FIND ONE ON YOUR OWN?
IF YOU GET ME, A WOMAN, KANZO, I WOULDN'T MIND BEING OBLIGED TO YOU THE REST OF MY LIFE.

BECAUSE OF MY FACE.

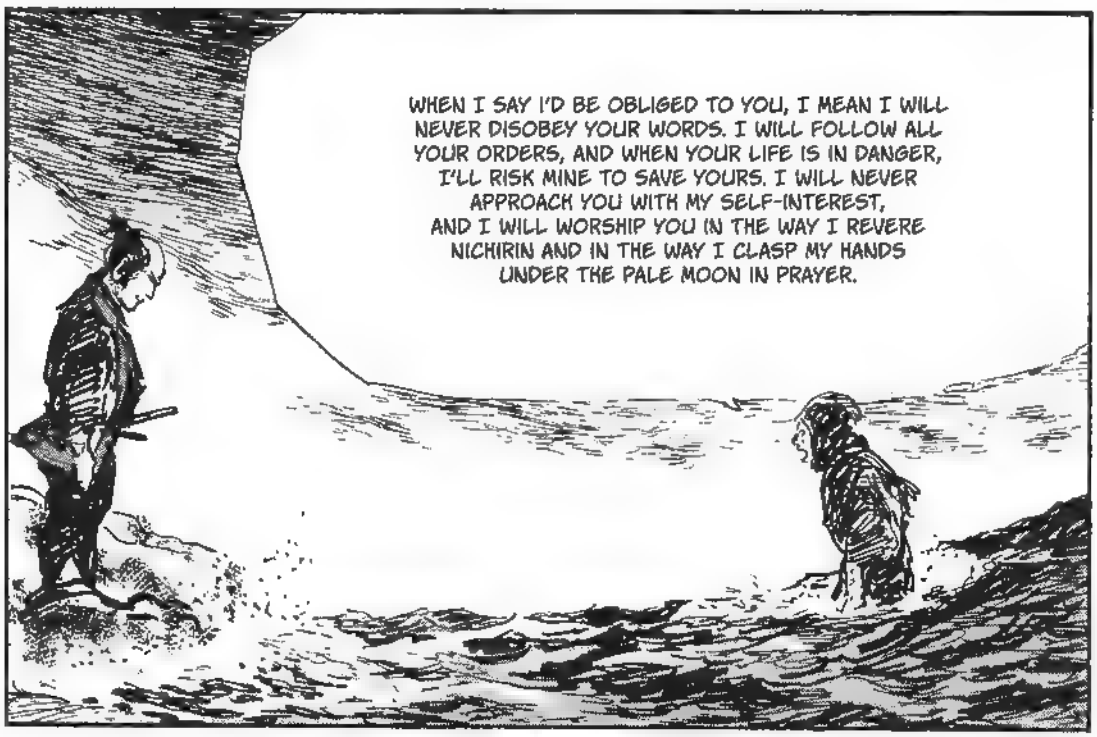
BUT A WOMAN WHO'D LIVE WITH ME IS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND.
IT'S EASY TO SNATCH AND RAPE A WOMAN.

HEE
HEE
HEE
HEE
HEE
HEE
HEE
HEE
HEE
I WANT A CHILD WHOM I CAN TEACH MY TECHNIQUES.
UNLESS I CAN LIVE WITH HER, I CAN'T HAVE OFFSPRING.


THAT'S WHY I SAID MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE YOU'VE SEEN MY FACE.
I THOUGHT I COULD TALK TO YOU, AND OPEN MY HEART.
WHY DO YOU THINK I'D GET YOU A WOMAN?
BESIDES, YOU ALREADY HAVE A WOMAN.
THERE, SHE'S COMING.

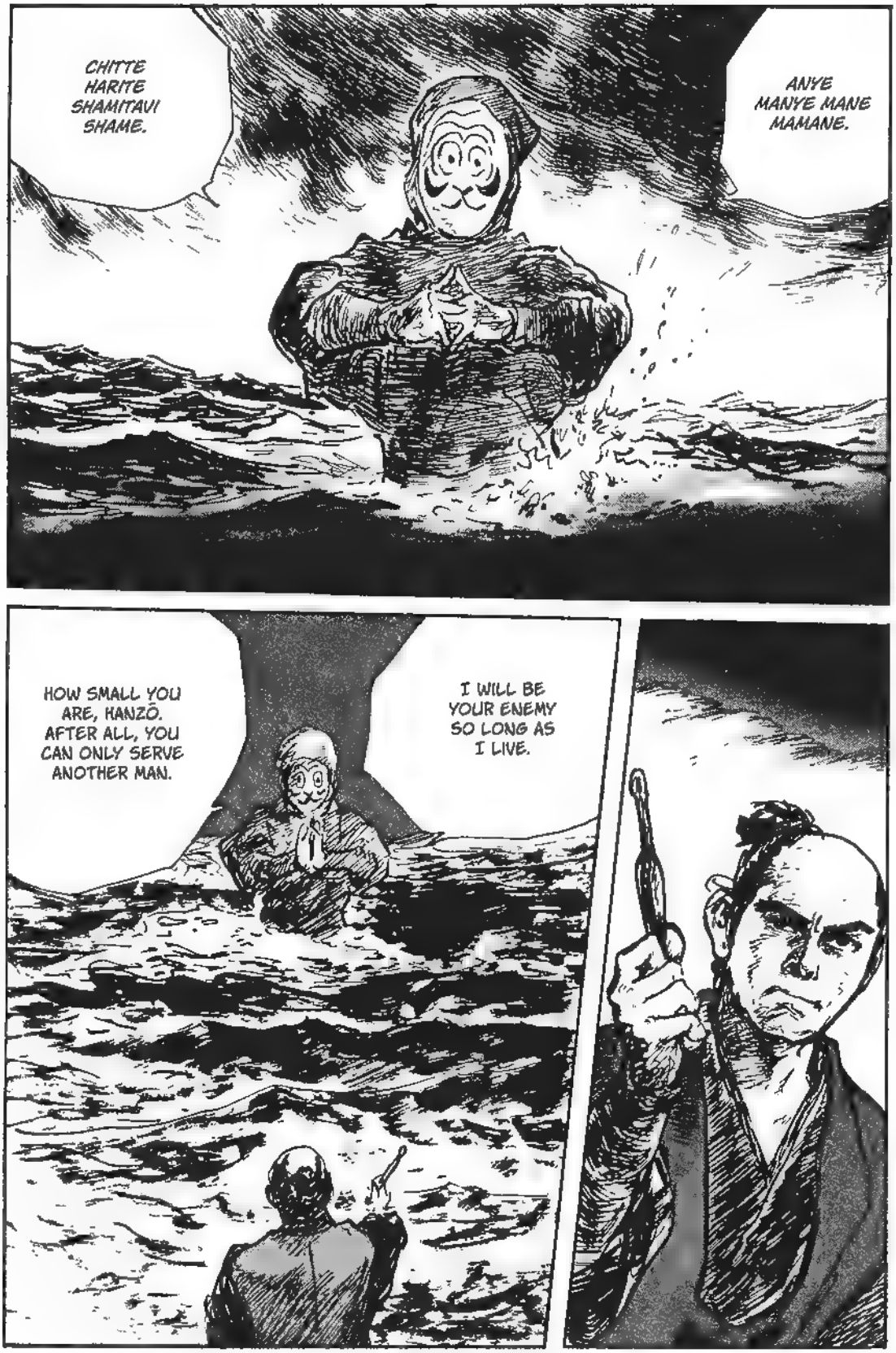
SHE'S AN ATTRACTIVE WOMAN.
I'VE KNOWN ABOUT HER FOR SOME TIME. I'VE WATCHED YOU AFTER WE FOUGHT, YOU SEE.
MM!
NO, NEVER!
GIVE HER TO ME.
SHE WOULD OBEY YOUR WORDS. SHE WOULDN'T REFUSE.

I SHOULDN'T SAY THIS MYSELF, BUT SOMEONE LIKE ME WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO HAVE A MATE.
HANZŌ, YOU'RE A GOOD-LOOKING MAN. YOU CAN GET AS MANY WOMEN AS YOU WANT.

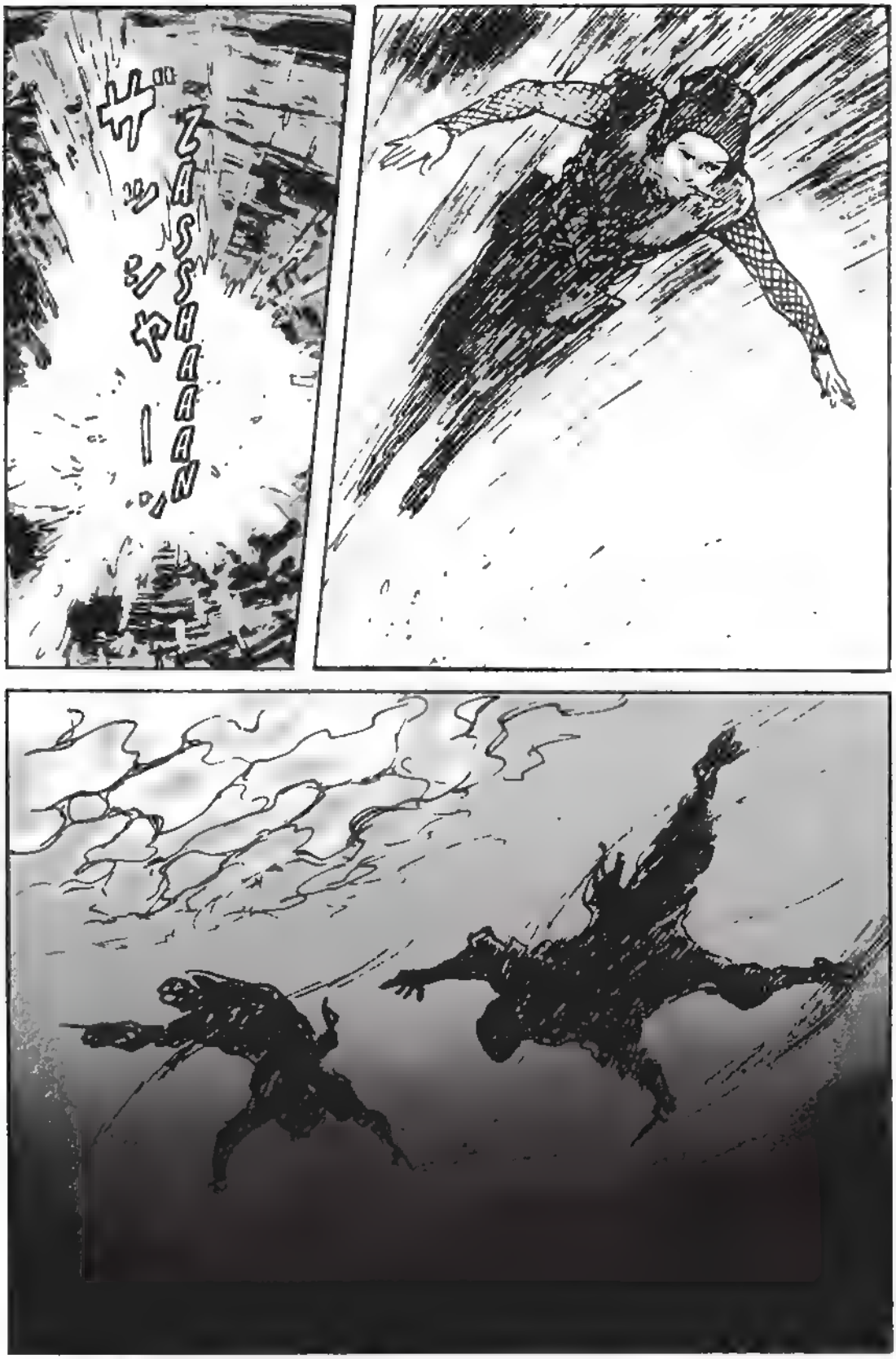

WHEN I SAY I'D BE OBLIGED TO YOU, I MEAN I WILL NEVER DISOBEY YOUR WORDS. I WILL FOLLOW ALL YOUR ORDERS, AND WHEN YOUR LIFE IS IN DANGER, I'LL RISK MINE TO SAVE YOURS. I WILL NEVER APPROACH YOU WITH MY SELF-INTEREST, AND I WILL WORSHIP YOU IN THE WAY I REVERE NICHIRIN AND IN THE WAY I CLASP MY HANDS UNDER THE PALE MOON IN PRAYER.

SHE'S NOT JUST A WOMAN. SHE'S MY WIFE. NOTHING CAN REPLACE MY LOVE.
ARE YOU TELLING ME A WOMAN IS BETTER THAN WHAT I OFFER?

IN THIS TIME OF WARRING STATES, THERE ARE SO MANY SAD, LOVELESS WOMEN.
LOVE IS NOT TO BE SOLD OR BOUGHT. IT IS NOT TO BE PILLAGED, STOLEN, OR REPLACED.
MMNG!
IT'S SOMETHING YOU MIGHT NEVER UNDERSTAND.


CHITTE HARITE SHAMITAVI SHAME.
ANYE MANYE MANE MAMANE.
HOW SMALL YOU ARE, HANZŌ. AFTER ALL, YOU CAN ONLY SERVE ANOTHER MAN.
I WILL BE YOUR ENEMY SO LONG AS I LIVE.

SHANTE MUKTE
MUKTATAME
SAME
AVASHAME...
WHEN YOU COULD BE THE LORD OF YOUR OWN TERRITORY IF YOU WERE ABLE TO ACT ON YOUR OWN HOW SAD IT IS THAT I OPENED MY HEART TO A TINY MAN LIKE YOU!
TSUKUMO, TAKE HIM OUT!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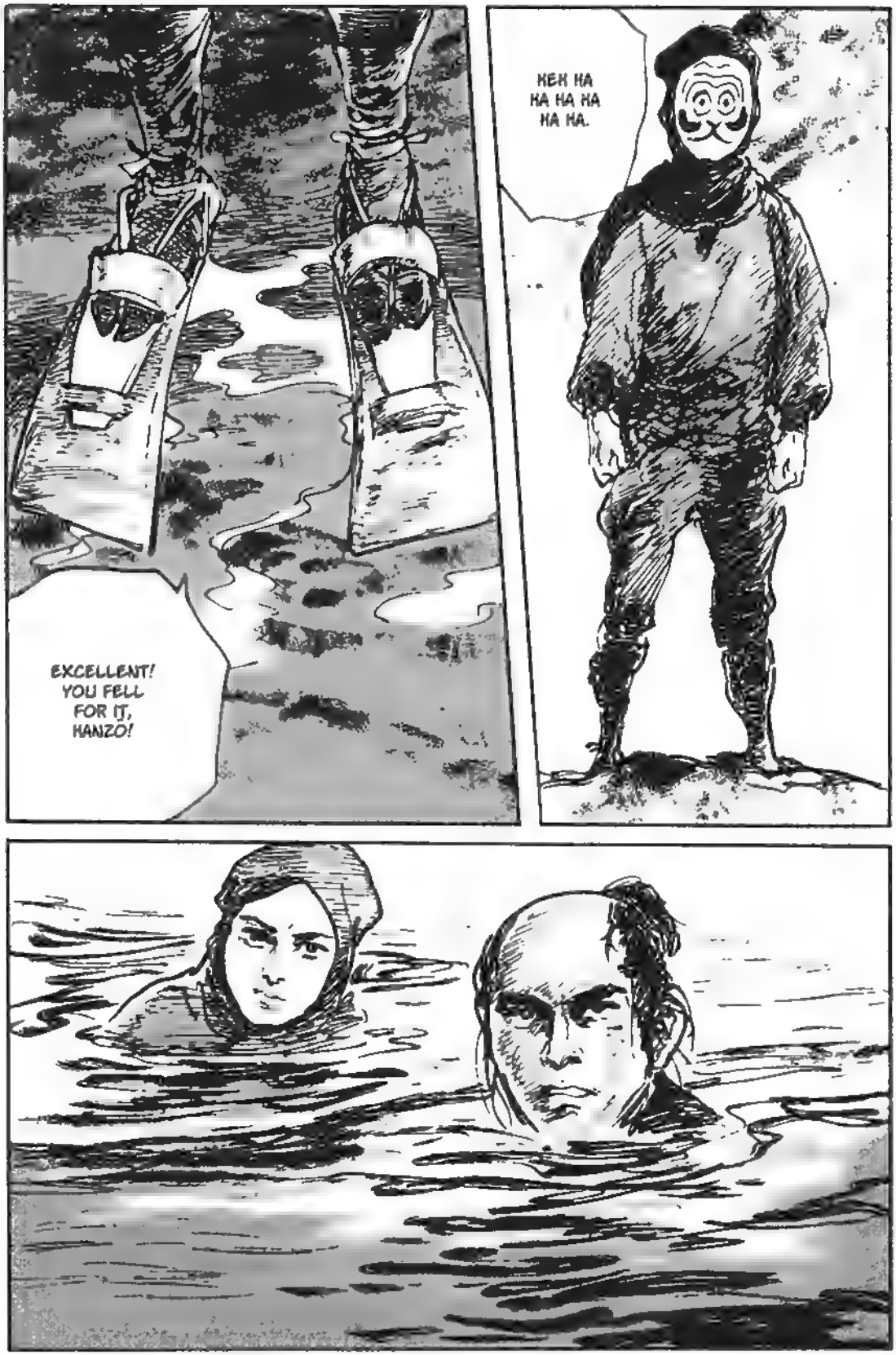
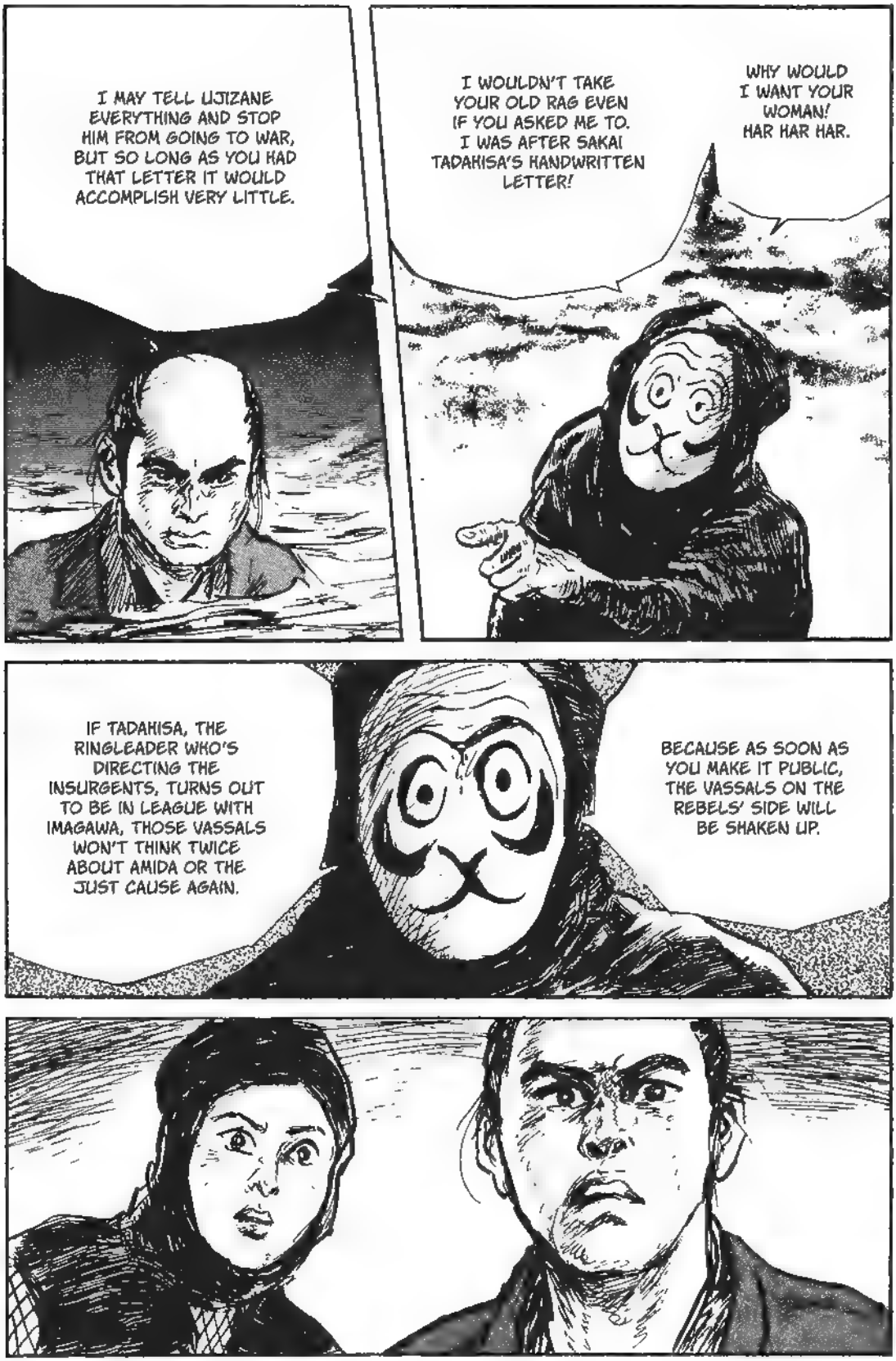

EXCELLENT! YOU FELL FOR IT, HANZO!
KEK HA HA HA HA HA HA.


I MAY TELL UJIZANE EVERYTHING AND STOP HIM FROM GOING TO WAR, BUT SO LONG AS YOU HAD THAT LETTER IT WOULD ACCOMPLISH VERY LITTLE.
I WOULDN'T TAKE YOUR OLD RAG EVEN IF YOU ASKED ME TO. I WAS AFTER SAKAI TADAHISA'S HANDWRITTEN LETTER!
WHY WOULD I WANT YOUR WOMAN! HAR HAR HAR.
IF TADAHISA, THE RINGLEADER WHO'S DIRECTING THE INSURGENTS, TURNS OUT TO BE IN LEAGUE WITH IMAGAWA, THOSE VASSALS WON'T THINK TWICE ABOUT AMIDA OR THE JUST CAUSE AGAIN.
BECAUSE AS SOON AS YOU MAKE IT PUBLIC, THE VASSALS ON THE REBELS' SIDE WILL BE SHAKEN UP.

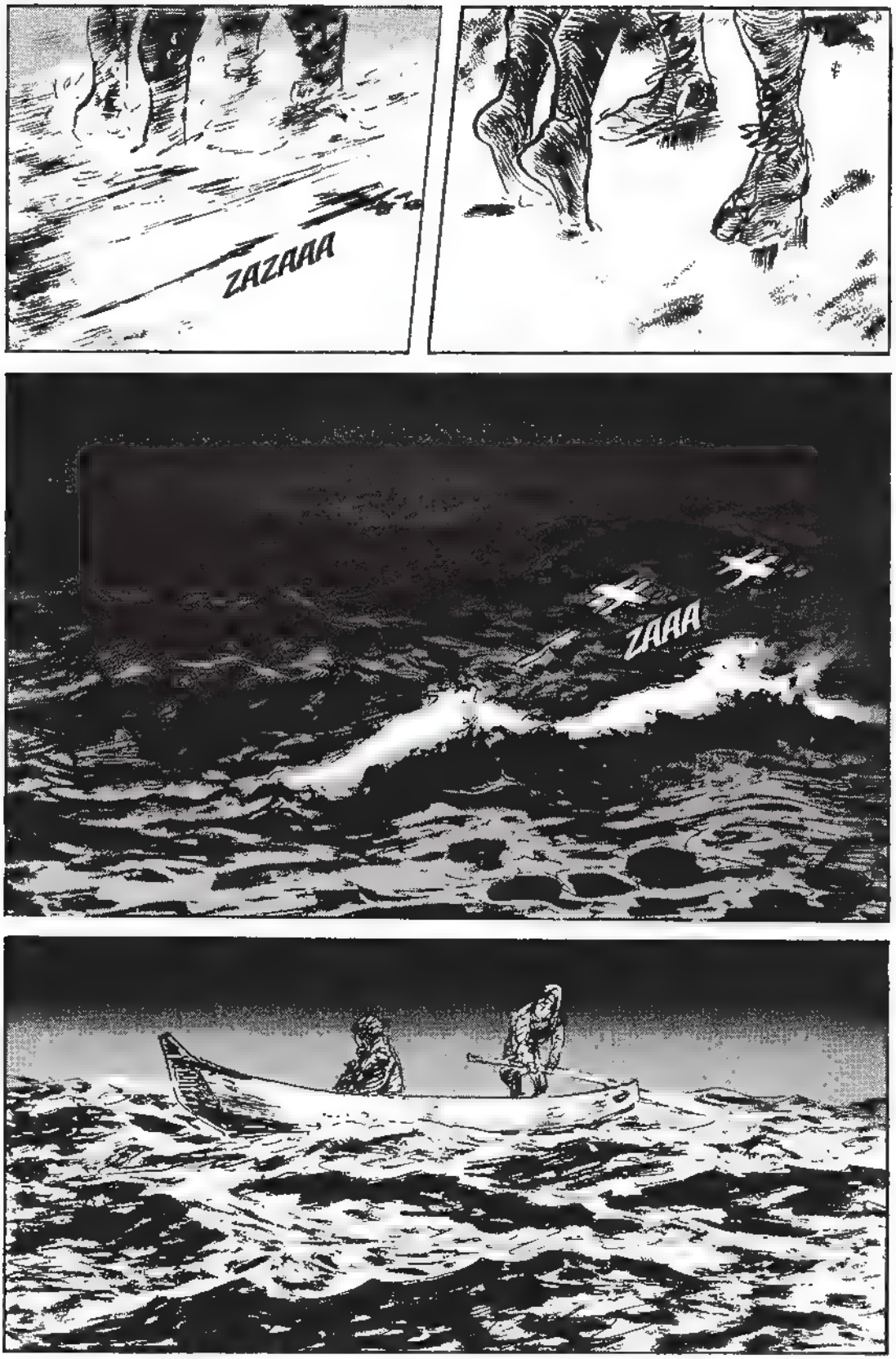
THE LETTER SHOULD BE RUINED NOW, WITH THE BLACK INK WASHED OUT. IT SHOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL WHO WROTE IT.
THAT'S WHY I HAD TO DO WHATEVER IT TOOK TO PROVOKE YOU TO DIVE INTO THE SEA. HEH HA HA HA HA HA.
GOOD BYE, HANZŌ!

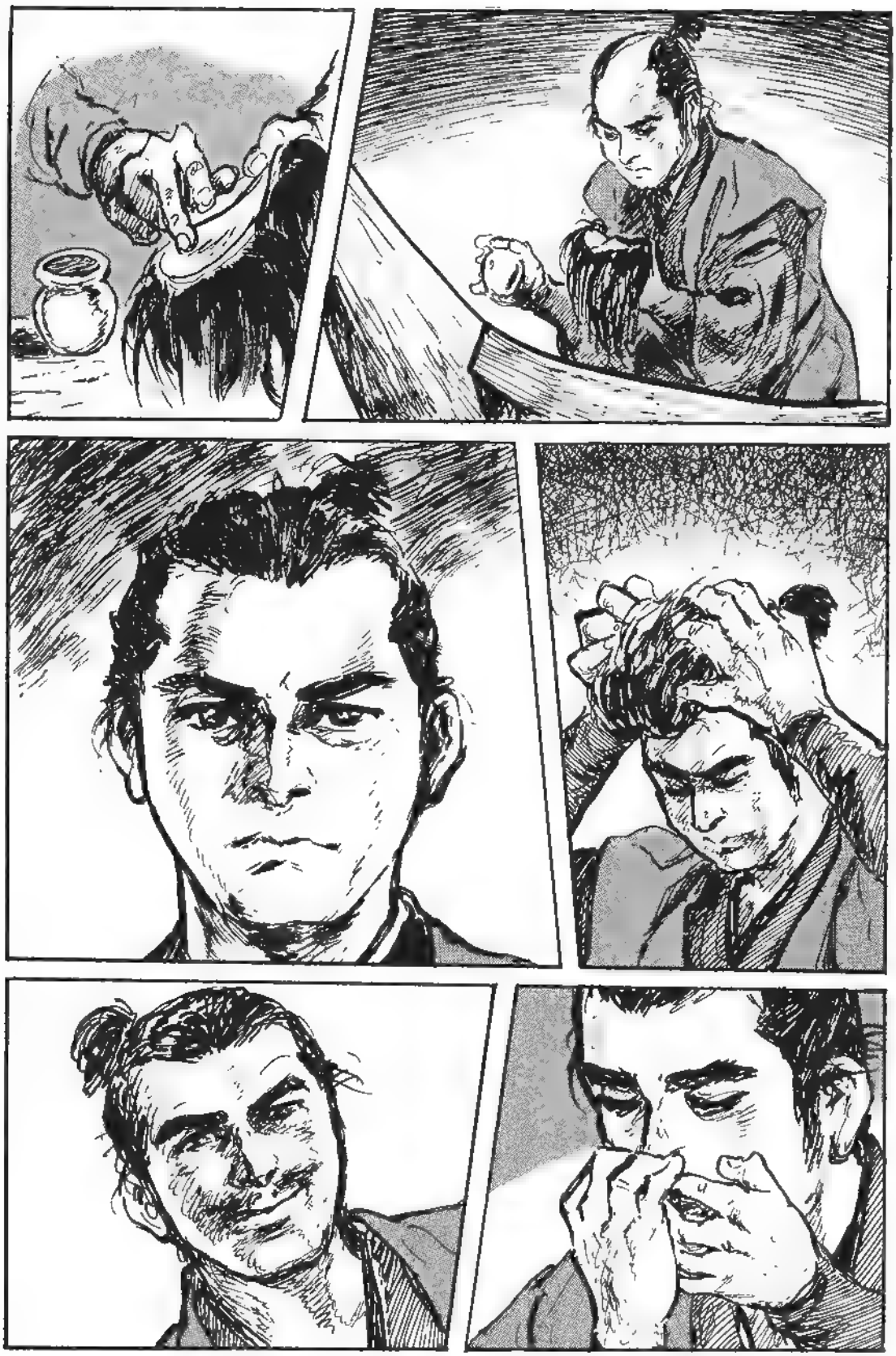
ZAAA

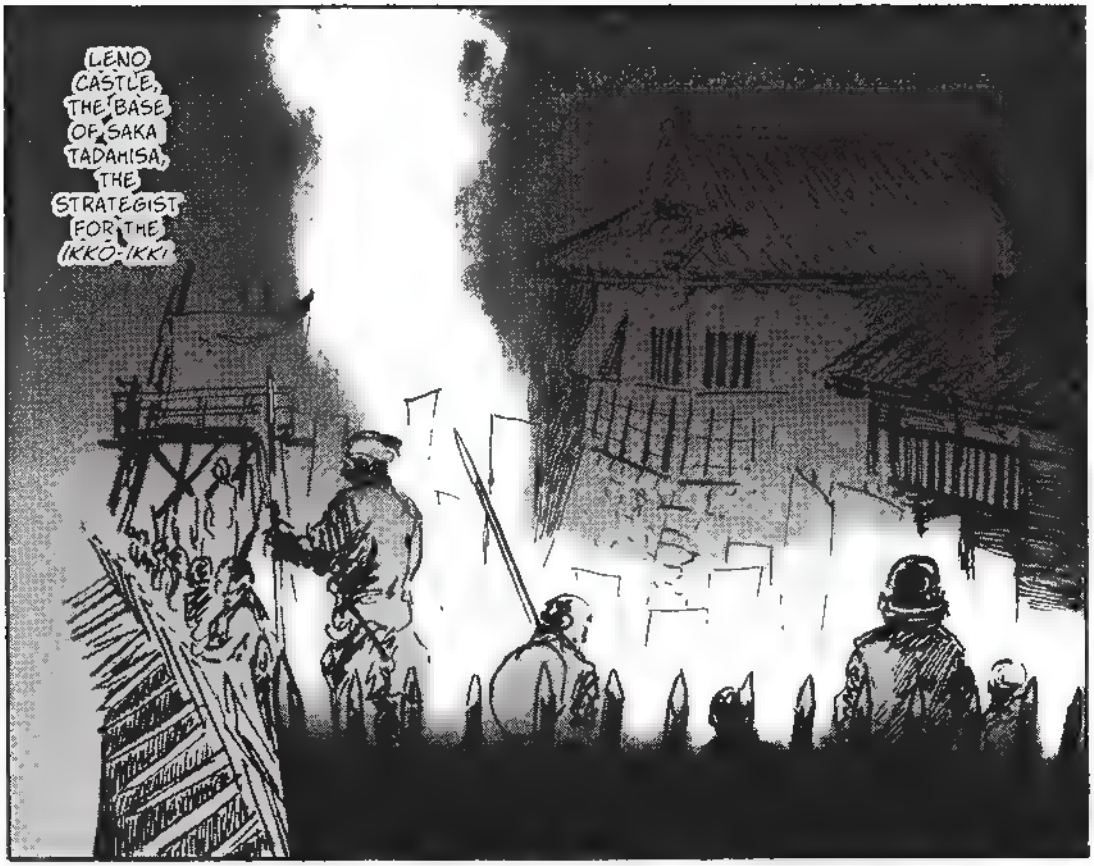
IF ONLY I COULD BRING THIS LETTER BACK WITH ME.
URGH...
BUT I FELL FOR HIS TRICK LIKE A FOOL. I LET HIM LURE ME INTO THE WATER AND DESTROYED IT!
JUST AS ENŌ SAID, IT COULD'VE STOPPED THE IKKŌ-IKKI!!

SHIT!
THE INK IS WASHED! NO ONE CAN TELL WHOSE HANDWRITING IT IS!
THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO NOW
...MY WIT'S END.
I AM AT...
WHY IS THAT? WHY CAN'T YOU JUST MAKE TADAHISA WRITE ANOTHER ONE?

BESIDES, YOU SPOKE WITH UJIZANE IN PERSON. FOOLING SOMEONE LIKE TADAHISA SHOULDN'T BE...
YOU ALREADY KNOW WHAT HE WROTE BEFORE.
IT CAN'T BE THAT HARD FOR YOU TO GET HIM TO WRITE.
ちゅっ
ちゅぱっ


ZAZAAA
ZAAA




LENO CASTLE, THE BASE OF SAKA TADAMISA, THE STRATEGIST FOR THE IKKŌ-IKKI.

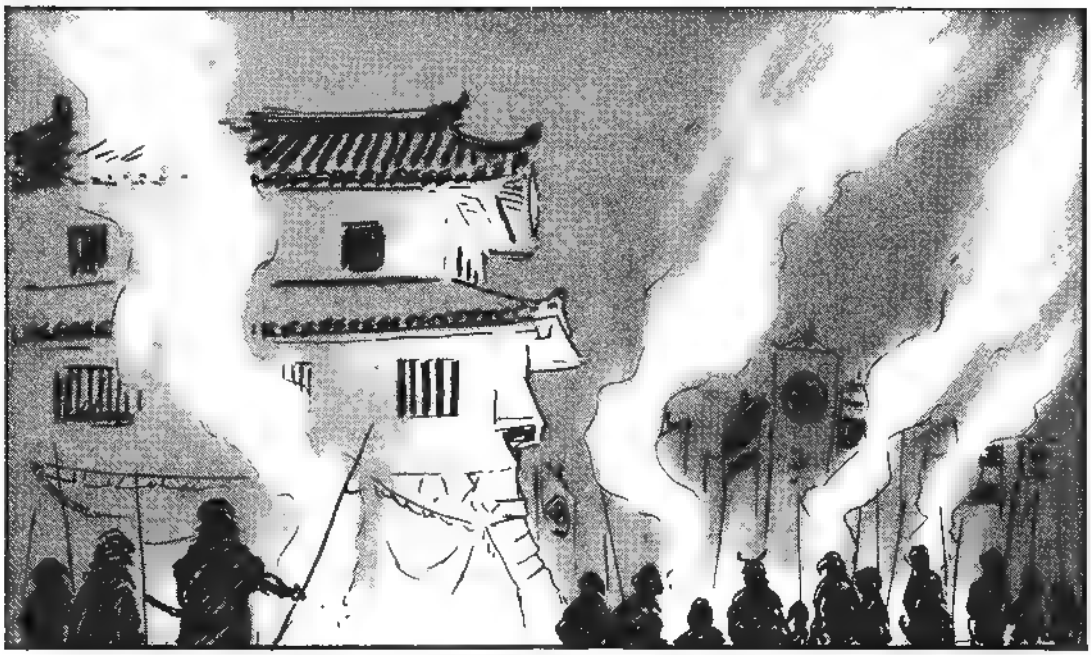
ONRIEDO GONGUJŌDO.

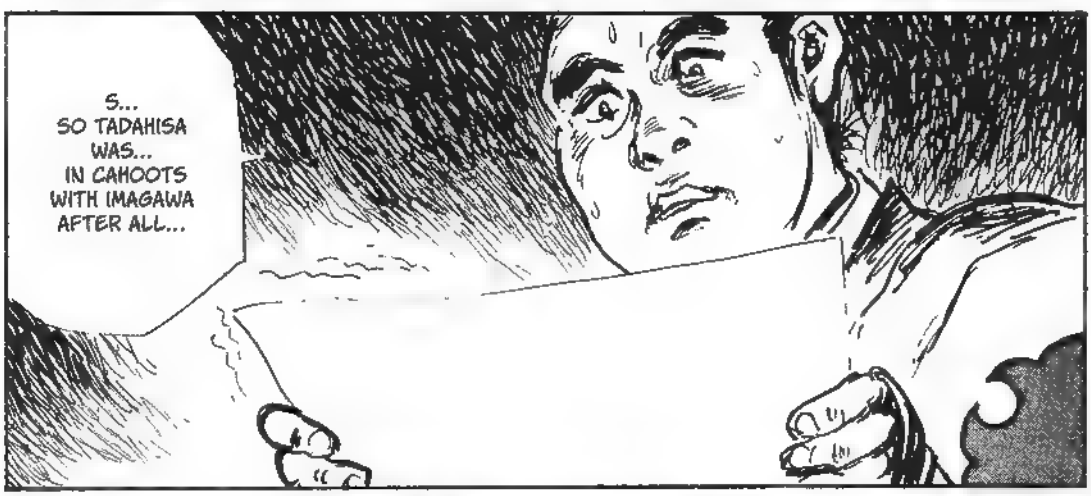
HYU
MILORD.
THANKS FOR DELIVERING THE LETTER.
OH... TANIMURA...
THIS IS TANIMURA SHINPACHIRŌ. I JUST RETURNED.

HM!
FURTHERMORE, THE REASON WHY HE WON'T INVADE MIKAWA NOW IS TO PREVENT THOSE ON THE REBELS' SIDE FROM RETURNING TO IEYASU.
UJIZANE-*SAMA* READ YOUR MISSIVE INFORMING HIM OF HOW, BY THE TIME NEW YEAR'S ROLLS AROUND, WE WILL HAVE THE ADVANTAGE. HE WAS QUITE SATISFIED AND SAID HE WOULDN'T MIND ENTRUSTING MIKAWA TO YOU, MILORD.
HE SAID HE WOULD LEAVE THE TIMING OF HIS INVASION UP TO YOU. BUT HE NEEDS YOU TO LET HIM KNOW WHEN, AND REQUESTED YOUR IMMEDIATE REPLY.
HE WAS EXCEPTIONALLY PLEASED THAT YOUR THOUGHTS ARE EXACTLY THE SAME ON THIS MATTER, MILORD.
AND IT APPEARS THAT HE INTENDS TO PERSUADE THEM USING YOUR LETTER, MILORD.
HE MUST DECIDE IN THREE DAYS. MANY OF HIS KEY VASSALS ARE URGING HIM TO ATTACK MIKAWA NOW.

HM.
THANKS AGAIN FOR YOUR TROUBLE.
I WILL FLY BACK TO SUNPU, SO PLEASE WRITE THE REPLY AT ONCE.
UJIZANE-*SAMA* MUST BE IN A TIGHT SPOT.
HM. OF COURSE. I CAN SEE THAT.

MM?
FWIP

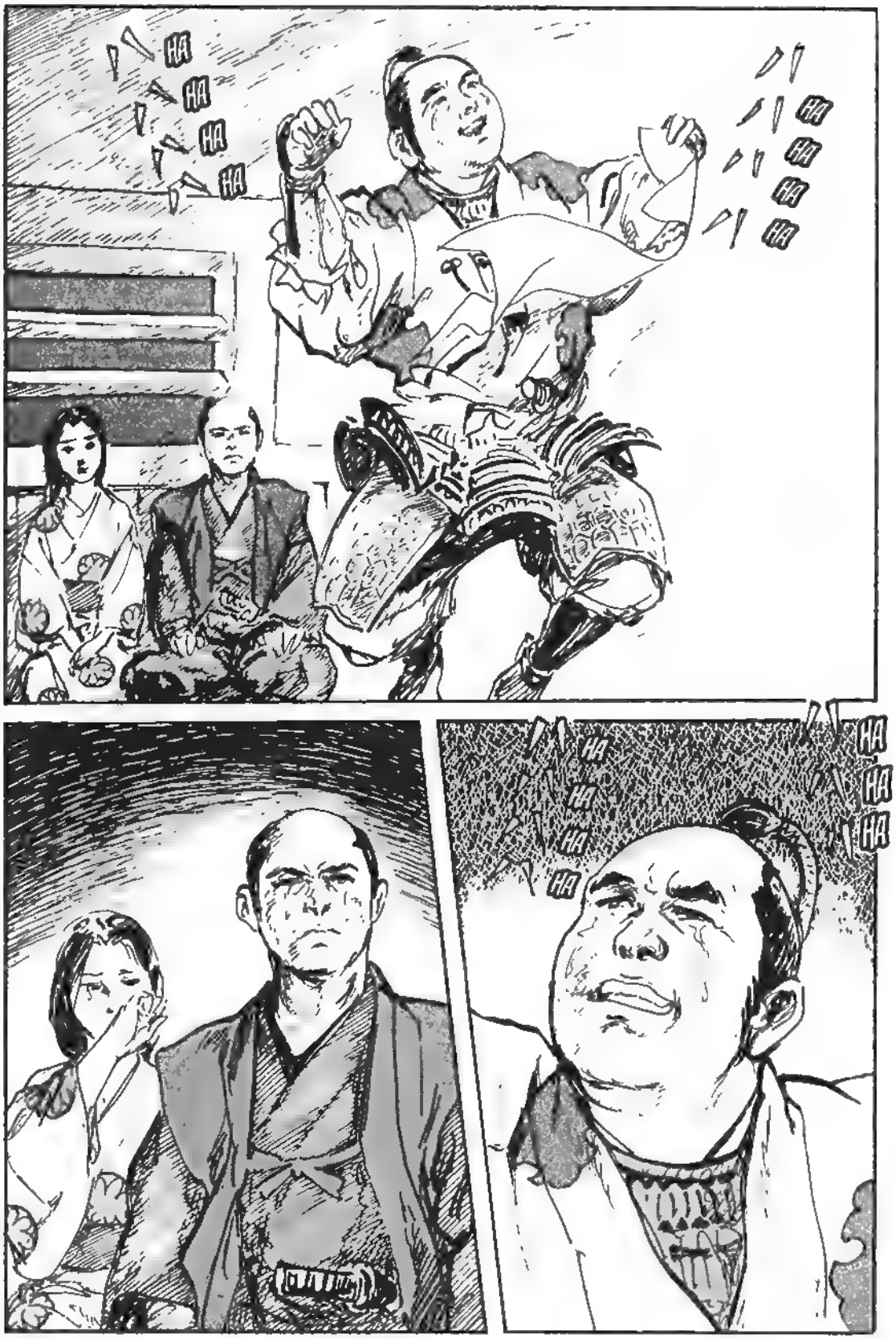



S...
SO TADAHISA WAS...
IN CAHOOTS WITH IMAGAWA AFTER ALL...

I...
I WONDER WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I SHOWED THIS LETTER TO THOSE WHO SUPPORT THE UPRISING.

THE IKKŌ-IKKI WOULD END.
HYA HA HA HA HA HA
HYA HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA

IT WILL BE NEW YEAR'S IN FOUR DAYS.
HANZŌ, WHAT DAY IS TODAY?
ALL OF US TOGETHER!
NOW... NOW WE CAN PASS THE YEAR.
INDEED.


HA
HA
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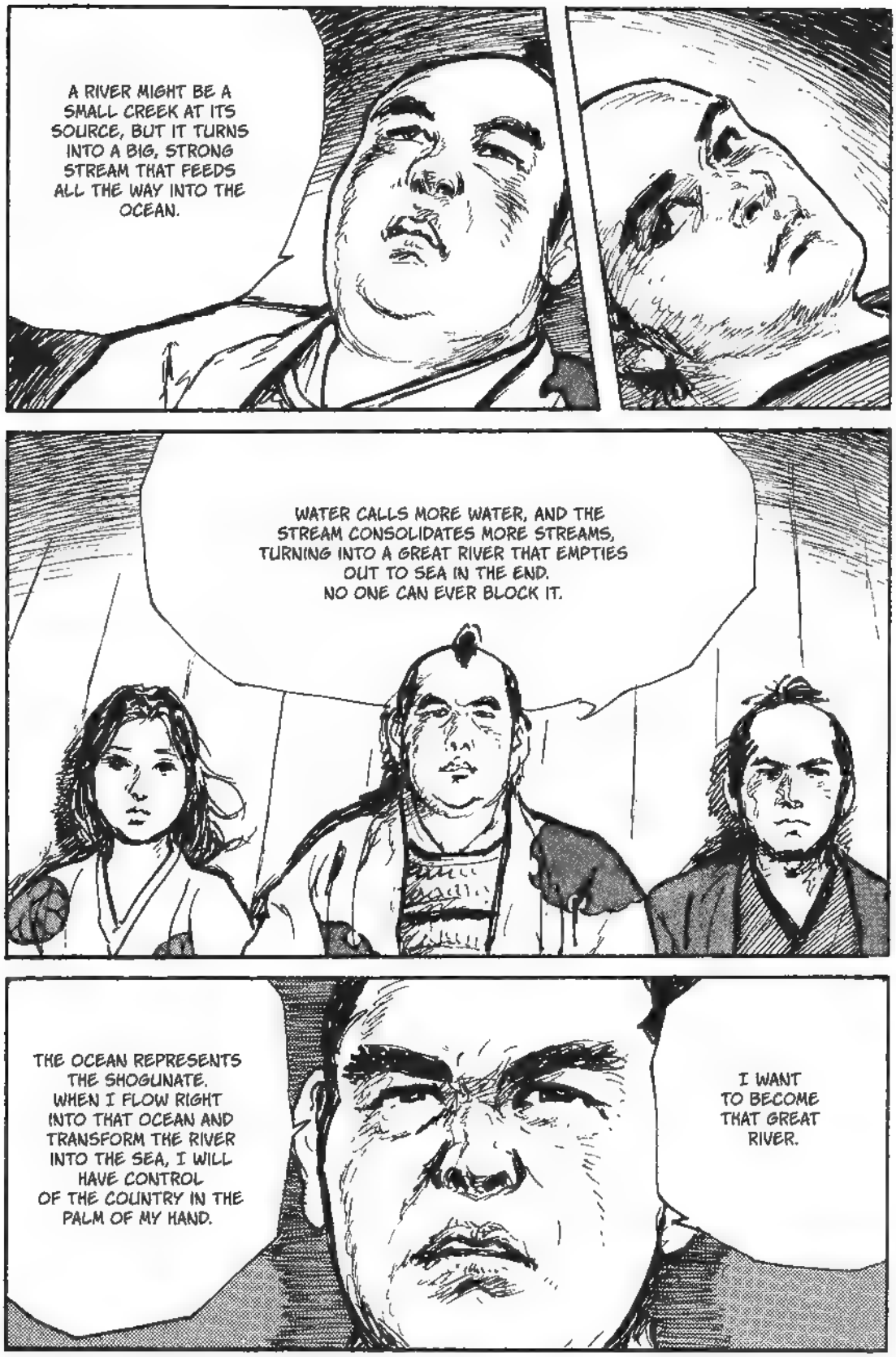
HA

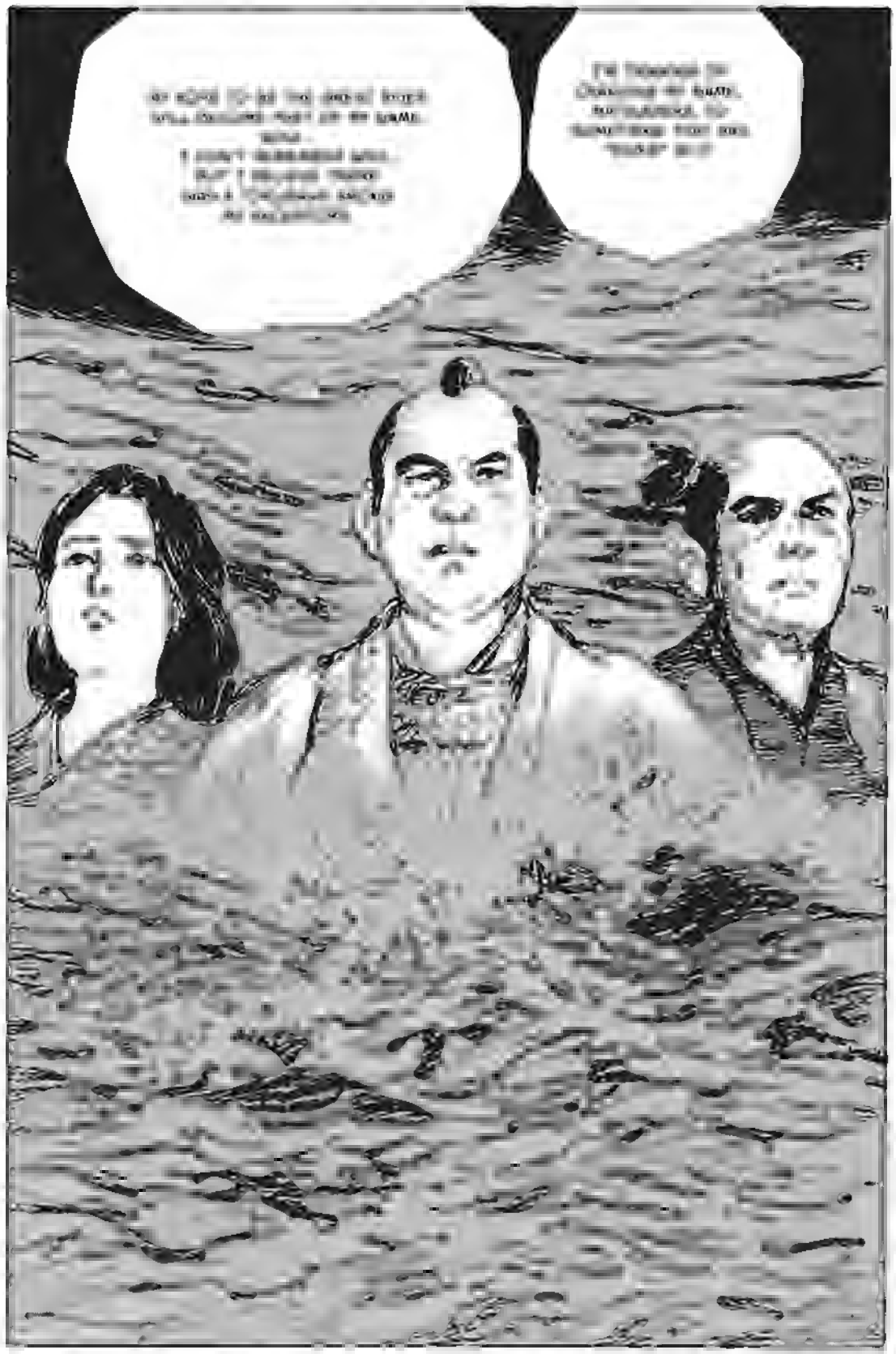
IT'S JUST THAT THE CLOGGED RIVER IS STARTING TO FLOW AGAIN. THAT'S ALL.
IT'S NOT OVER YET.

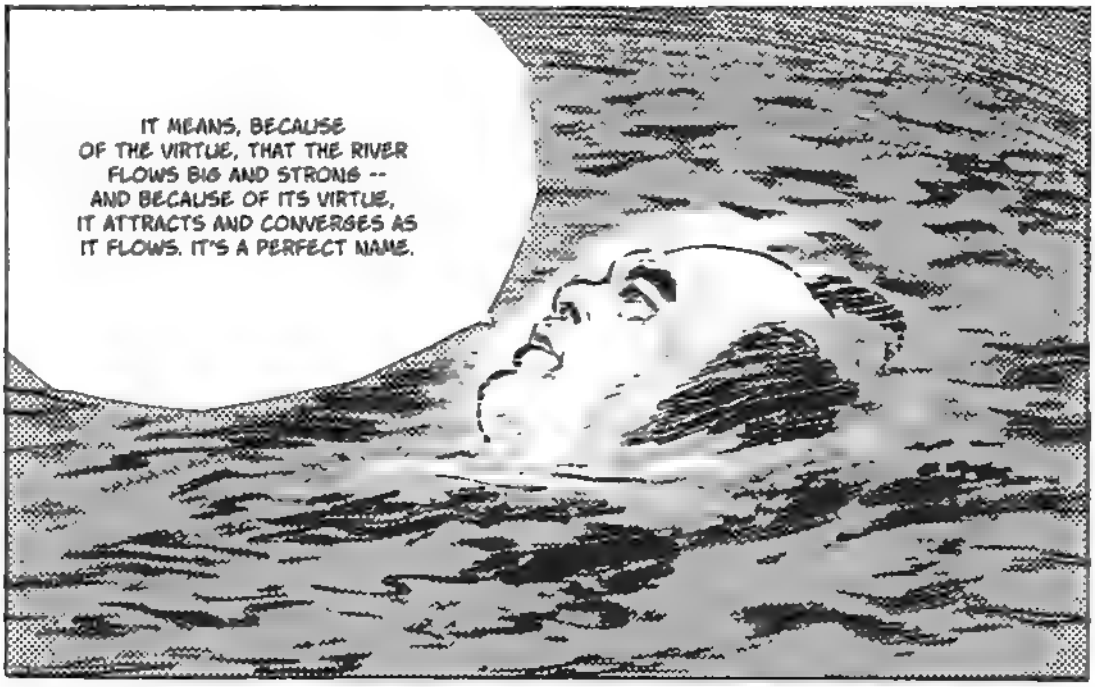
HUH?
YOU MUST BE TIRED TOO. LIE DOWN BESIDE ME -- ON BOTH MY SIDES.
I'M ORDERING YOU TO. HURRY UP AND LIE DOWN!
HOW CAN WE LIE DOWN IN YOUR PRESENCE, MILORD?
LOOK, WE'LL FORM A RIVER.
YES SIR.

WHEN THERE ARE THREE OF US WE CAN FORM A *KANJI* LIKE THIS, FOR RIVER. ONE MAN ALONE CAN'T DO THAT.


A RIVER MIGHT BE A SMALL CREEK AT ITS SOURCE, BUT IT TURNS INTO A BIG, STRONG STREAM THAT FEEDS ALL THE WAY INTO THE OCEAN.
WATER CALLS MORE WATER, AND THE STREAM CONSOLIDATES MORE STREAMS, TURNING INTO A GREAT RIVER THAT EMPTIES OUT TO SEA IN THE END. NO ONE CAN EVER BLOCK IT.
THE OCEAN REPRESENTS THE SHOGUNATE. WHEN I FLOW RIGHT INTO THAT OCEAN AND TRANSFORM THE RIVER INTO THE SEA, I WILL HAVE CONTROL OF THE COUNTRY IN THE PALM OF MY HAND.
I WANT TO BECOME THAT GREAT RIVER.

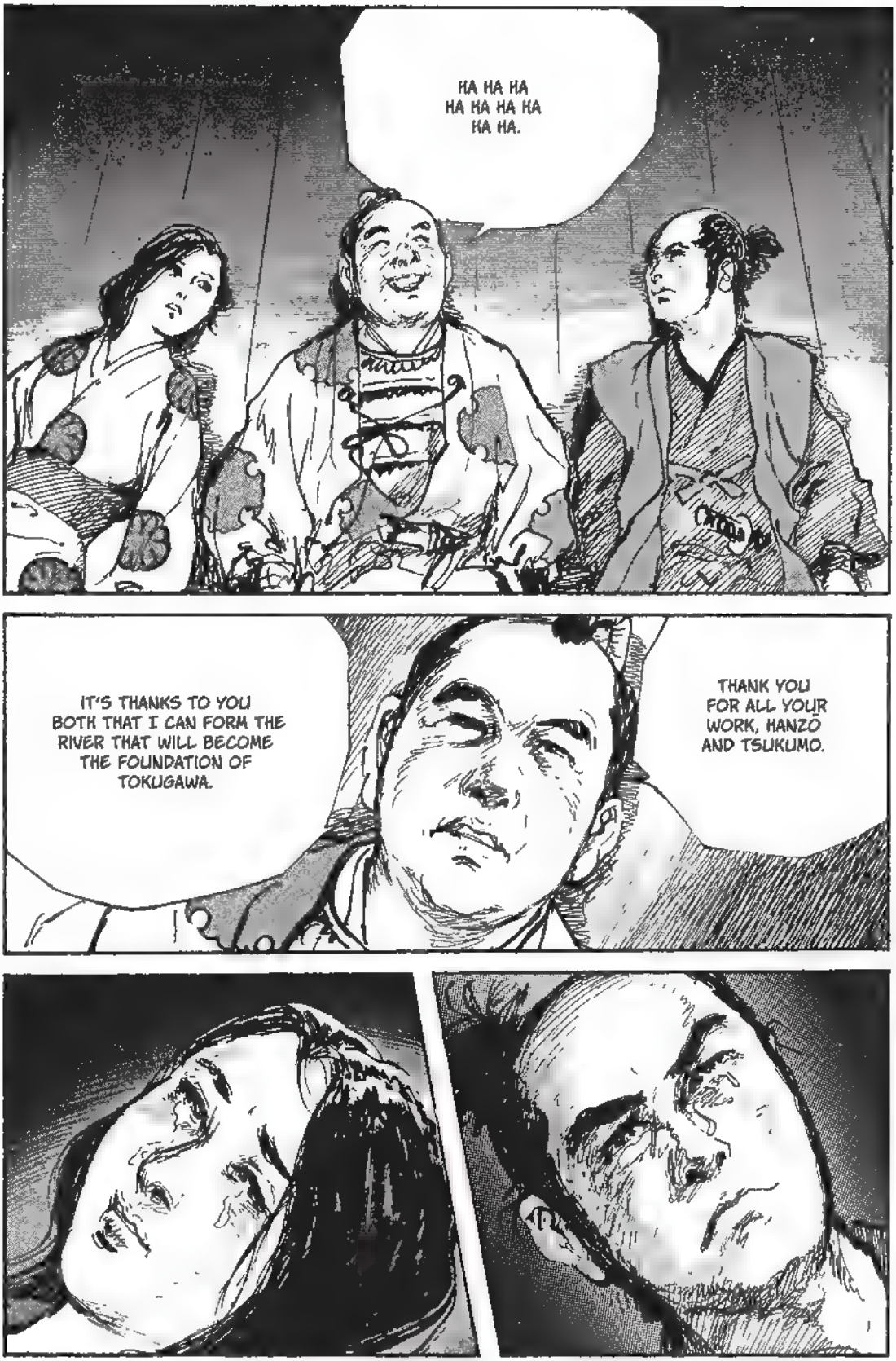
I HOPE MY VASSALS WHO SIDED WITH THE INSURGENTS WILL COME BACK TO ME AND MAKE MY STREAM EVEN BIGGER
THAT'S MY DREAM WITH THREE OF US TOGETHER CLEAN WORK & POWER LIKE THIS AT LAST

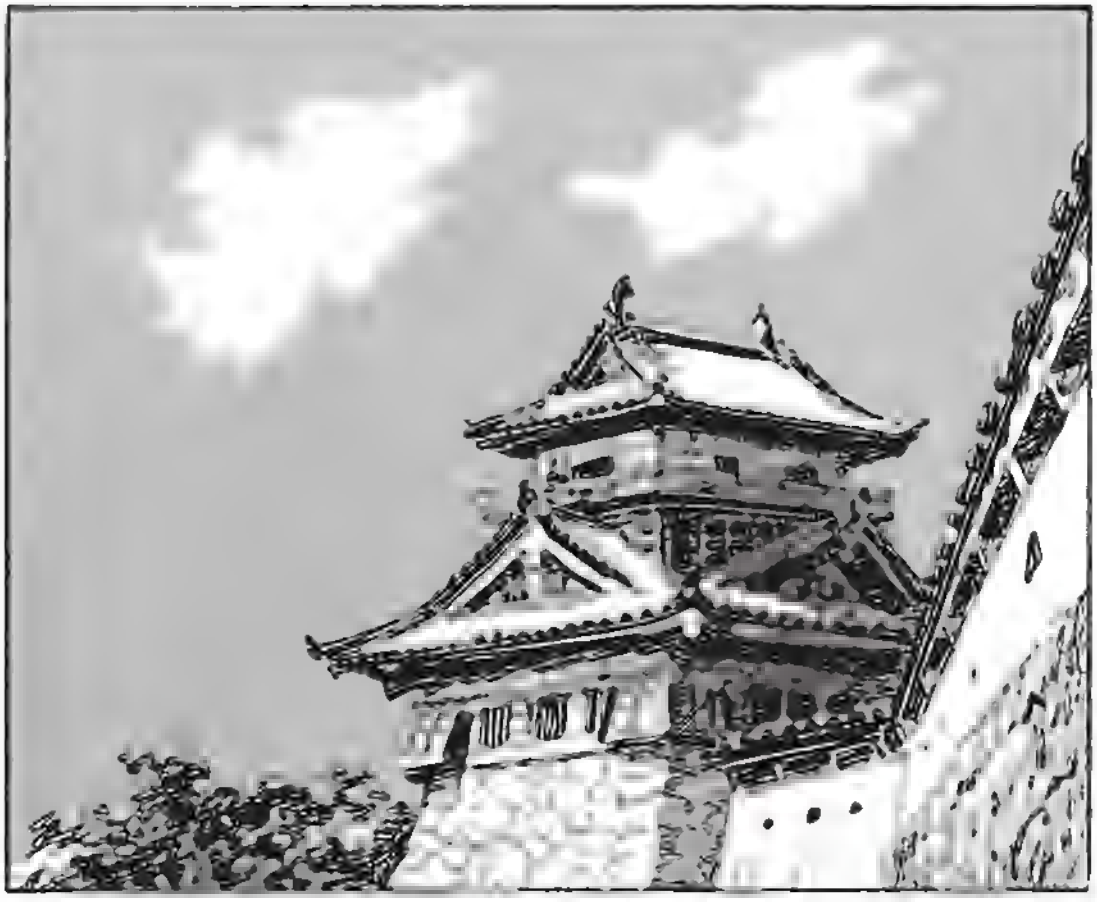



IT MEANS, BECAUSE OF THE VIRTUE, THAT THE RIVER FLOWS BIG AND STRONG -- AND BECAUSE OF ITS VIRTUE, IT ATTRACTS AND CONVERGES AS IT FLOWS. IT'S A PERFECT NAME.

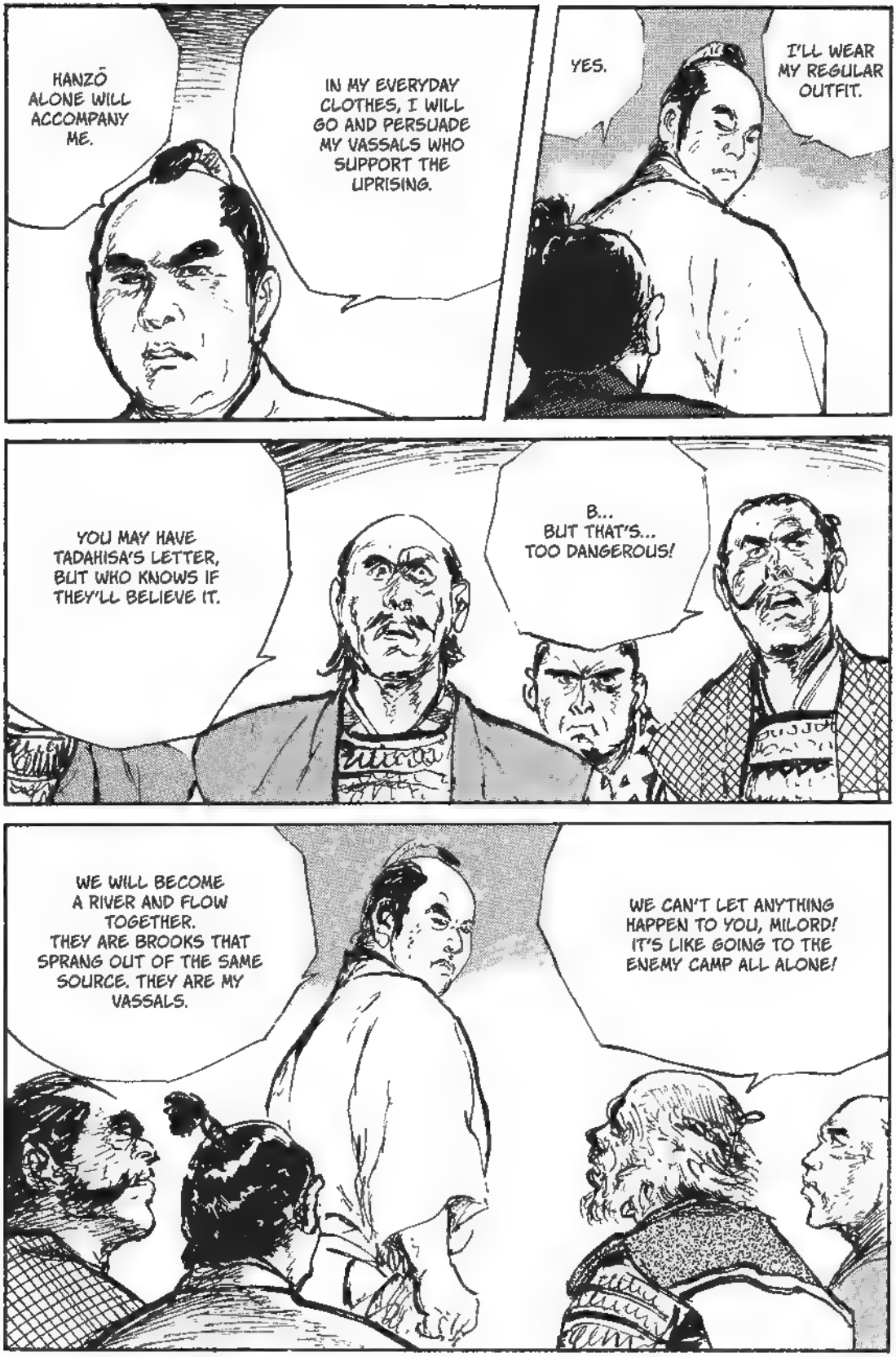
THAT'S RIGHT TOKUGAWA.
TOKUGAWA.

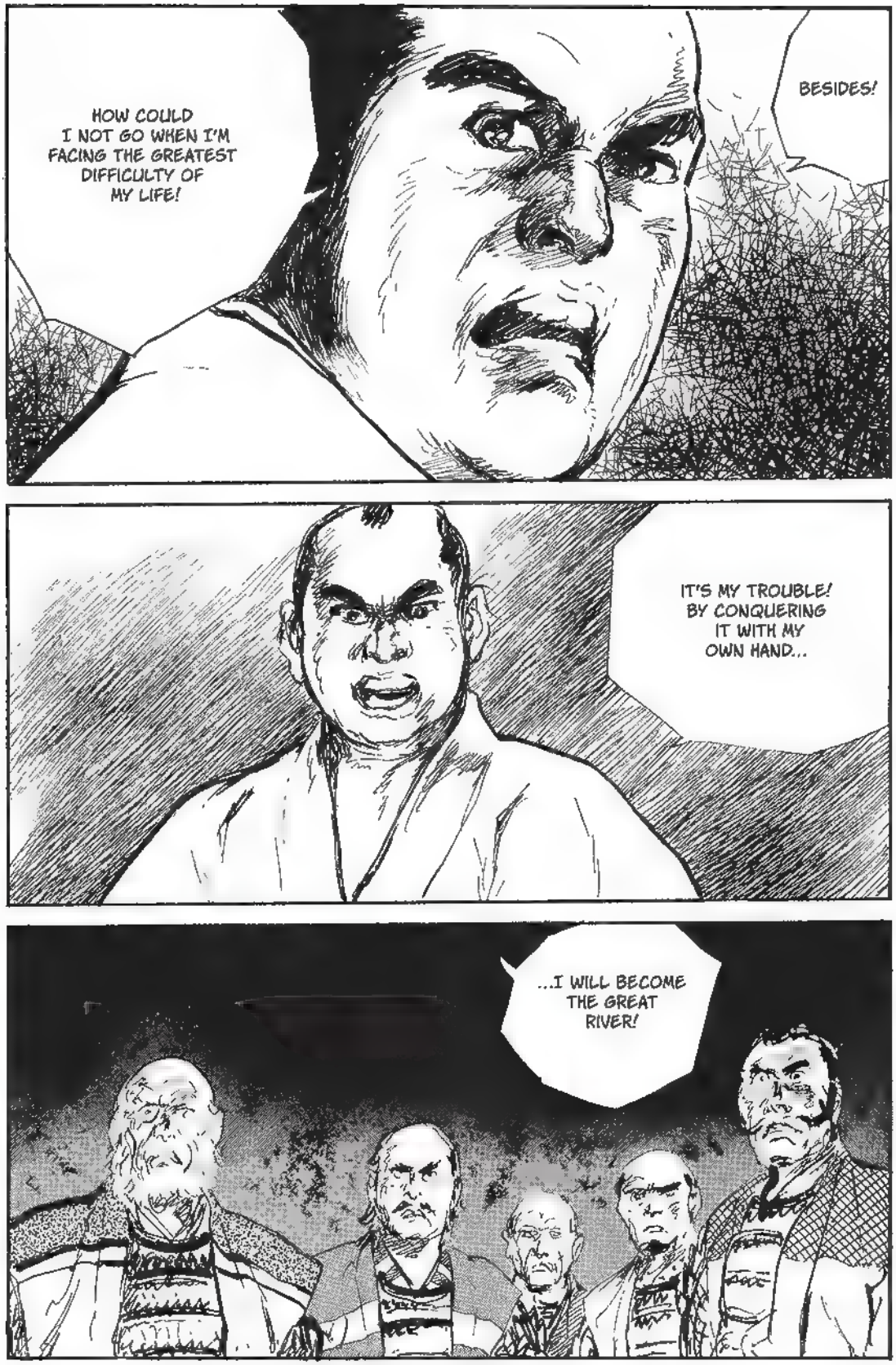
BUT IT'S TOO SOON. IT HAS TO BE AFTER MIKAWA IS UNDER FULL CONTROL. OTHERWISE, THE WEIGHT OF THE NAME MIGHT CRUSH ME INSTEAD.
IT ALSO TIES IN WITH THE RIVER OF MIKAWA.

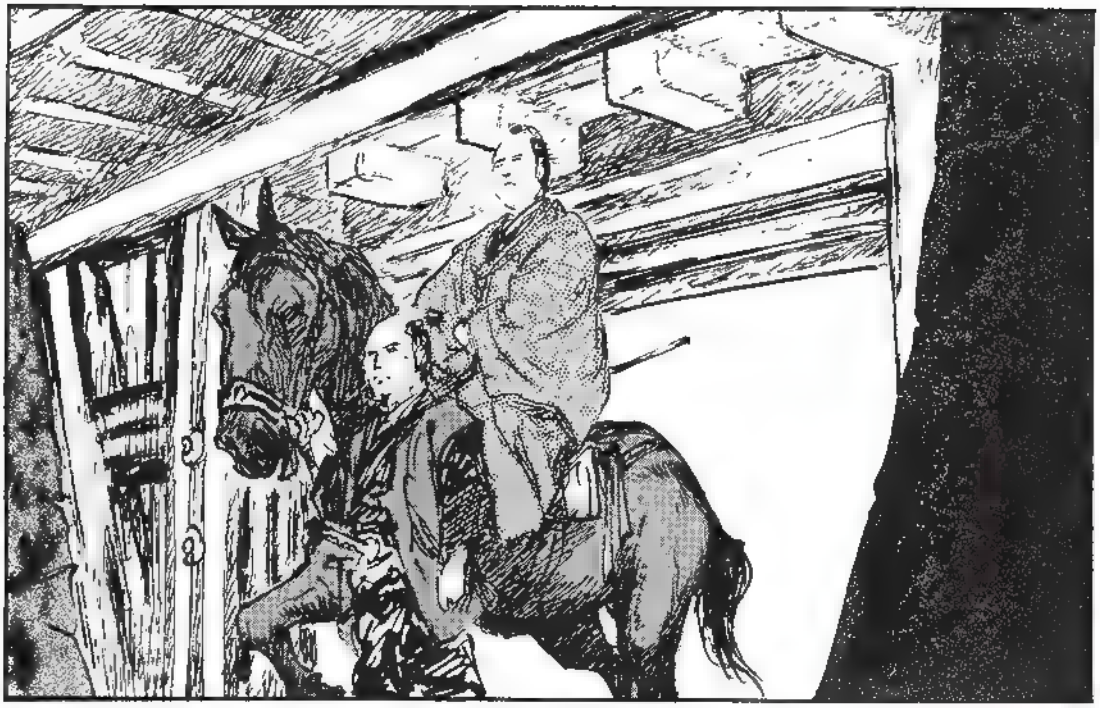

HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA.
IT'S THANKS TO YOU BOTH THAT I CAN FORM THE RIVER THAT WILL BECOME THE FOUNDATION OF TOKUGAWA.
THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR WORK, HANZŌ AND TSUKUMO.



PULL EVERY SOLDIER BACK.
YES SIR.
I'M TAKING OFF MY BATTLE GEAR.


HANZŌ ALONE WILL ACCOMPANY ME.
IN MY EVERYDAY CLOTHES, I WILL GO AND PERSUADE MY VASSALS WHO SUPPORT THE UPRISING.
YES.
I'LL WEAR MY REGULAR OUTFIT.
YOU MAY HAVE TADAHISA'S LETTER, BUT WHO KNOWS IF THEY'LL BELIEVE IT.
B... BUT THAT'S... TOO DANGEROUS!
WE WILL BECOME A RIVER AND FLOW TOGETHER. THEY ARE BROOKS THAT SPRANG OUT OF THE SAME SOURCE. THEY ARE MY VASSALS.
WE CAN'T LET ANYTHING HAPPEN TO YOU, MILORD! IT'S LIKE GOING TO THE ENEMY CAMP ALL ALONE!


HOW COULD I NOT GO WHEN I'M FACING THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY OF MY LIFE!
BESIDES!
IT'S MY TROUBLE! BY CONQUERING IT WITH MY OWN HAND...
...I WILL BECOME THE GREAT RIVER!



FOR IEYASU, IT WAS, INDEED, THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY AND TRIAL OF HIS LIFE.

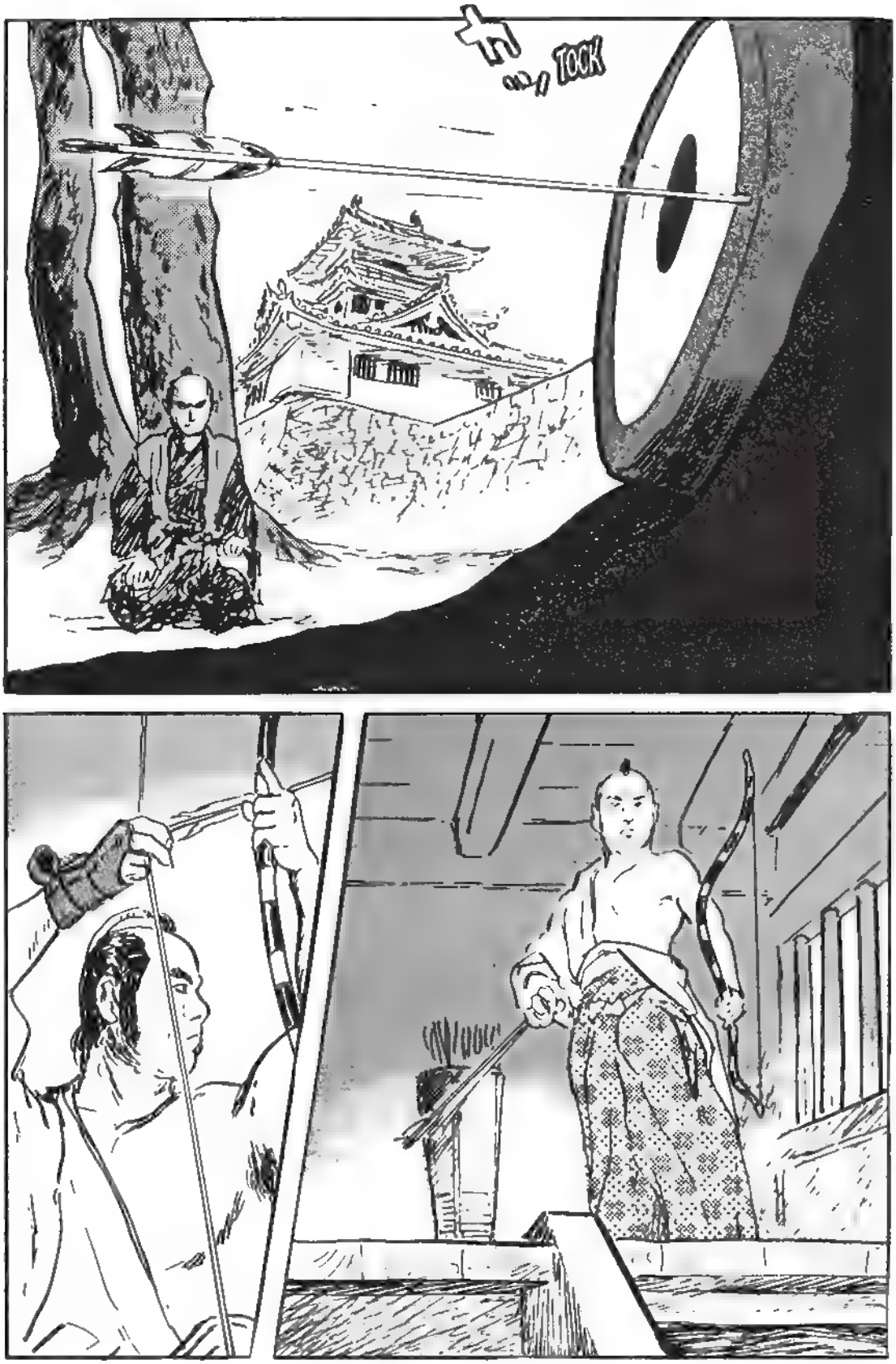
THAT WAS HOW THE *IKKŌ-IKKI* WAS PUT DOWN.

HONDA YAHACHIRŌ, MATSUDAIRA IETSUGU, AND MOST OF THE OTHER VASSALS WERE FORGIVEN.

SEEKING UJIZANE'S SHELTER, SAKAI TADAHISA, THE MASTERMIND BEHIND THE *IKKŌ-IKKI*, FLED TO SUNPU. KIRA YOSHIAKI AND ARAKAWA YOSHIKIRO DISAPPEARED SOMEWHERE.

Chapter On Shogyō Mujō

No. 2: Changing Countenance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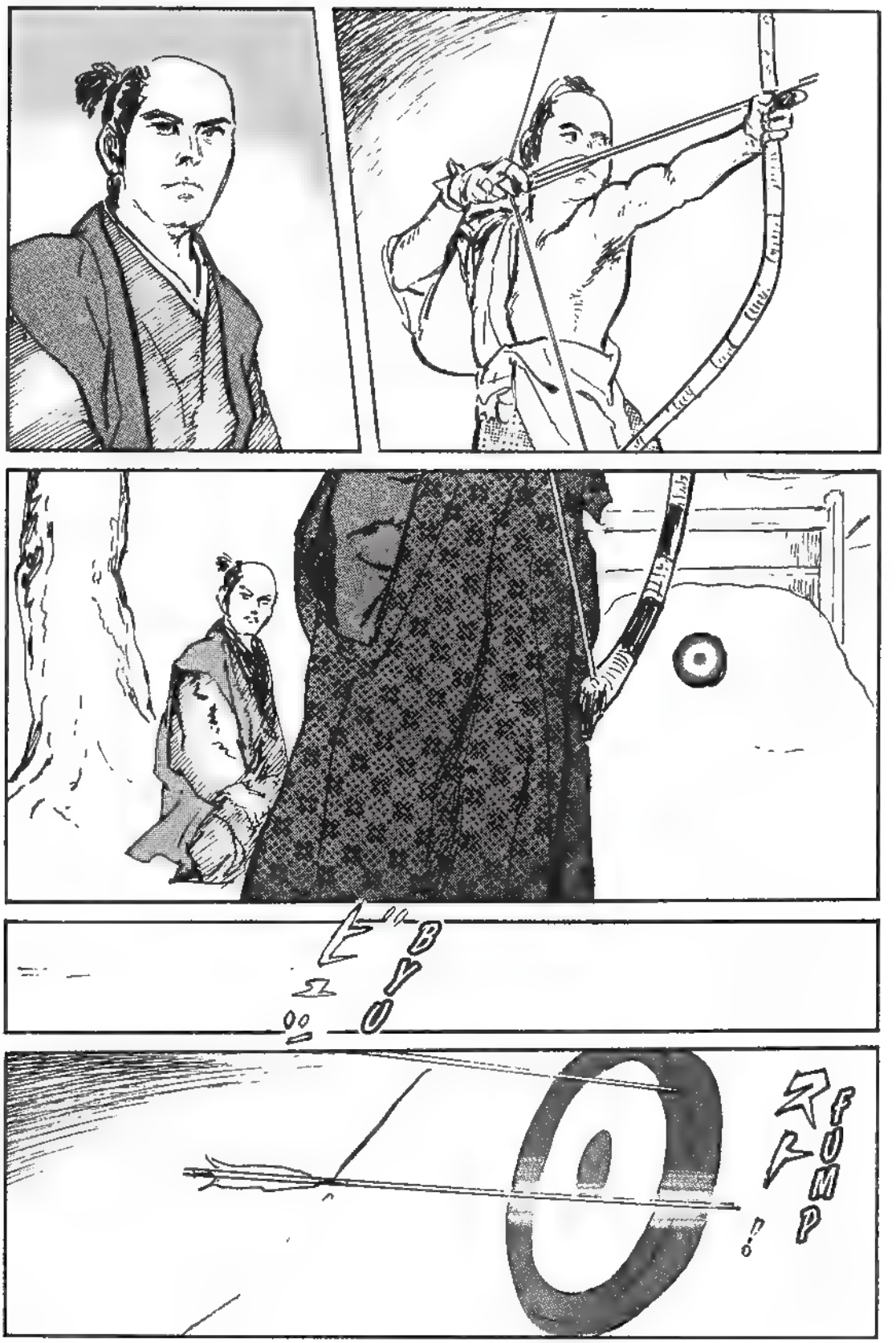
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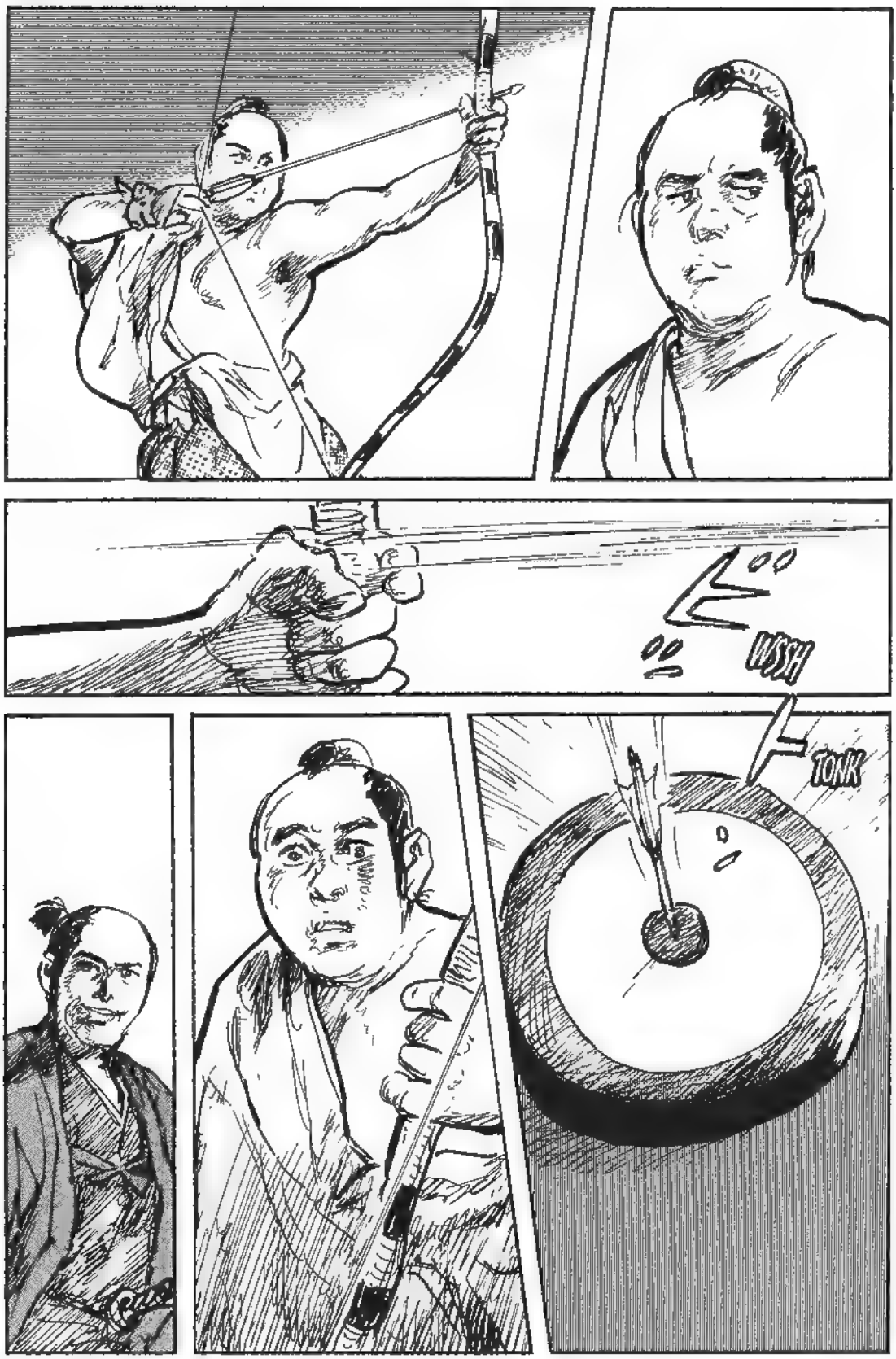
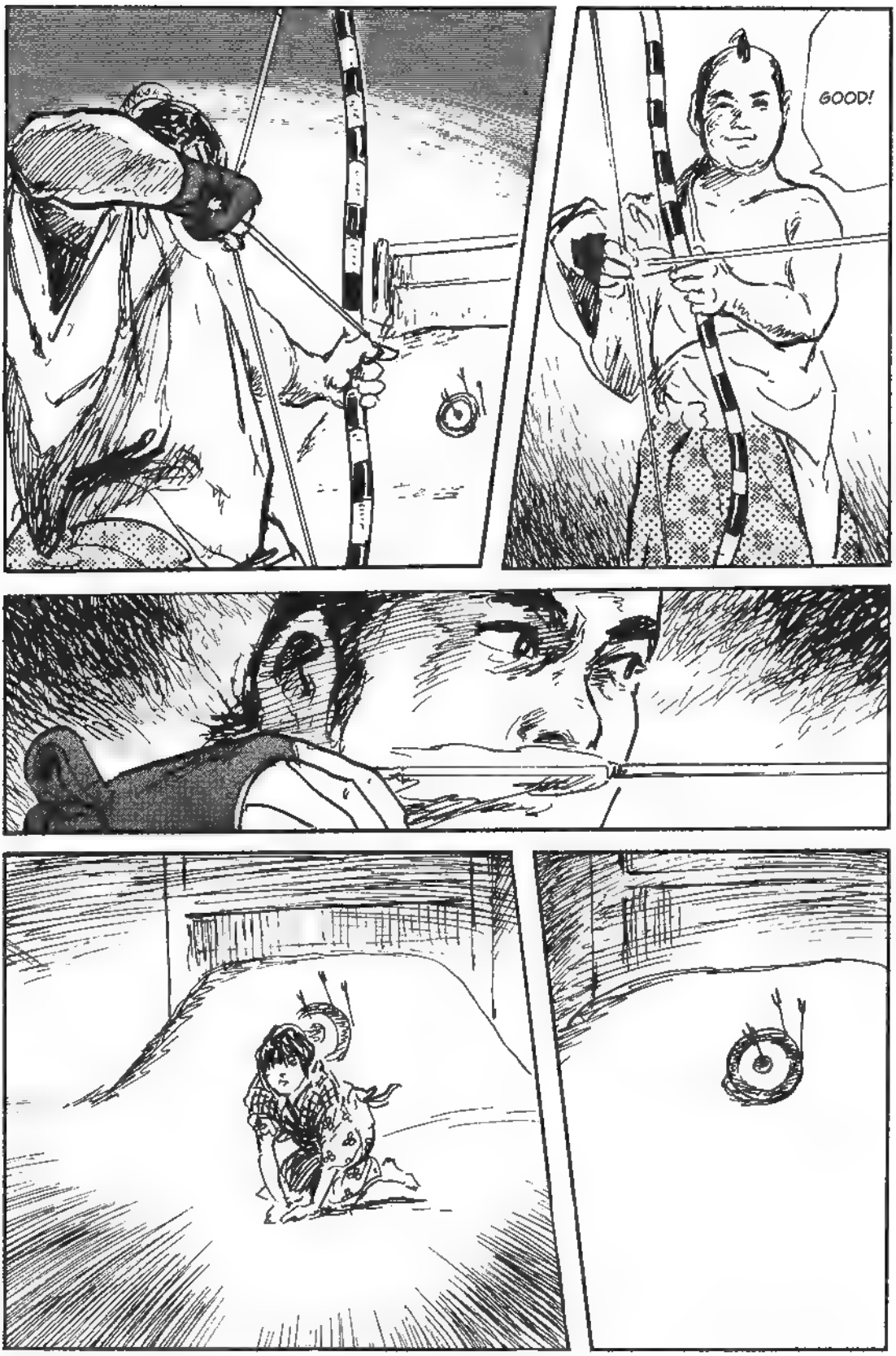
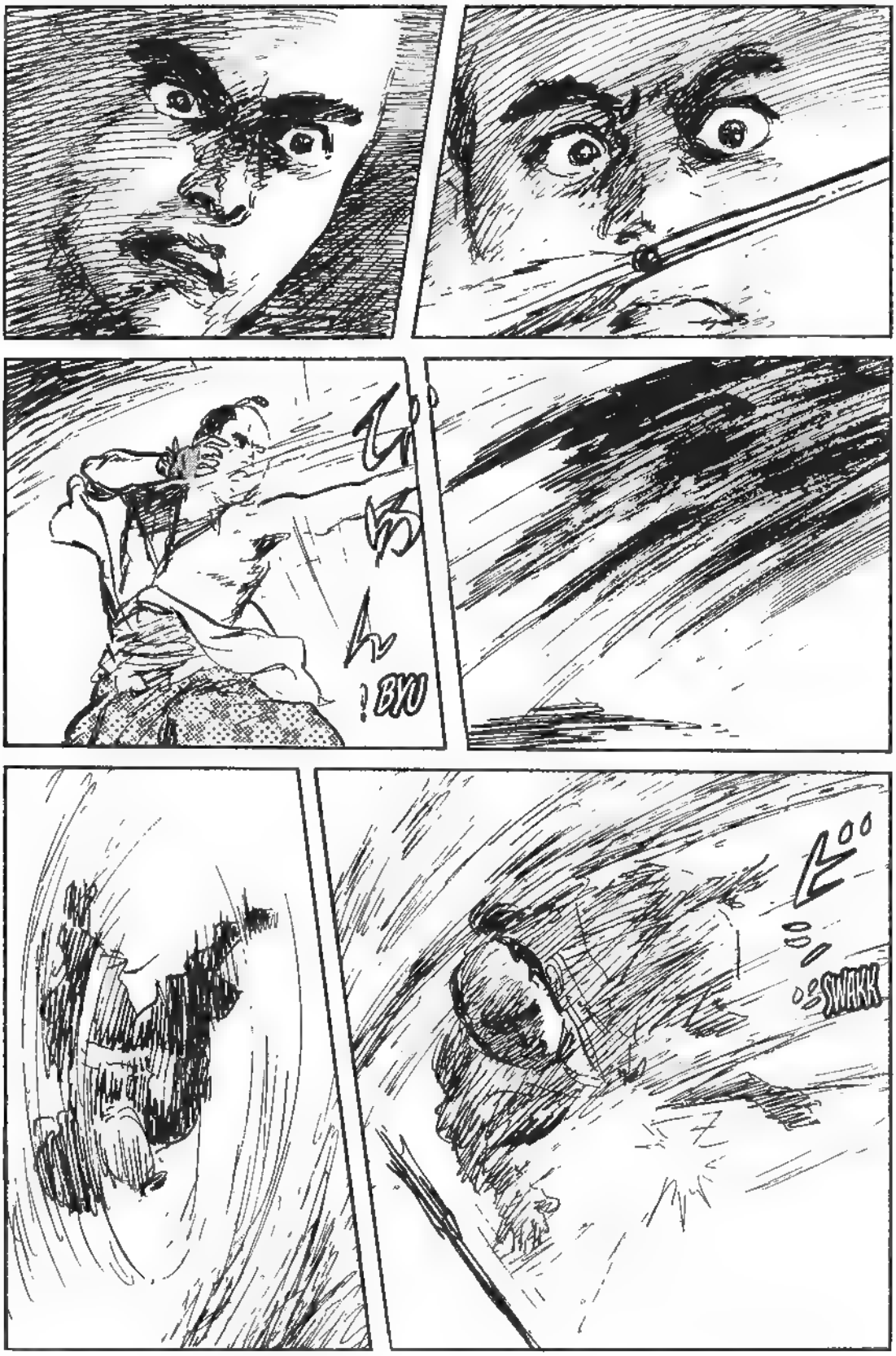
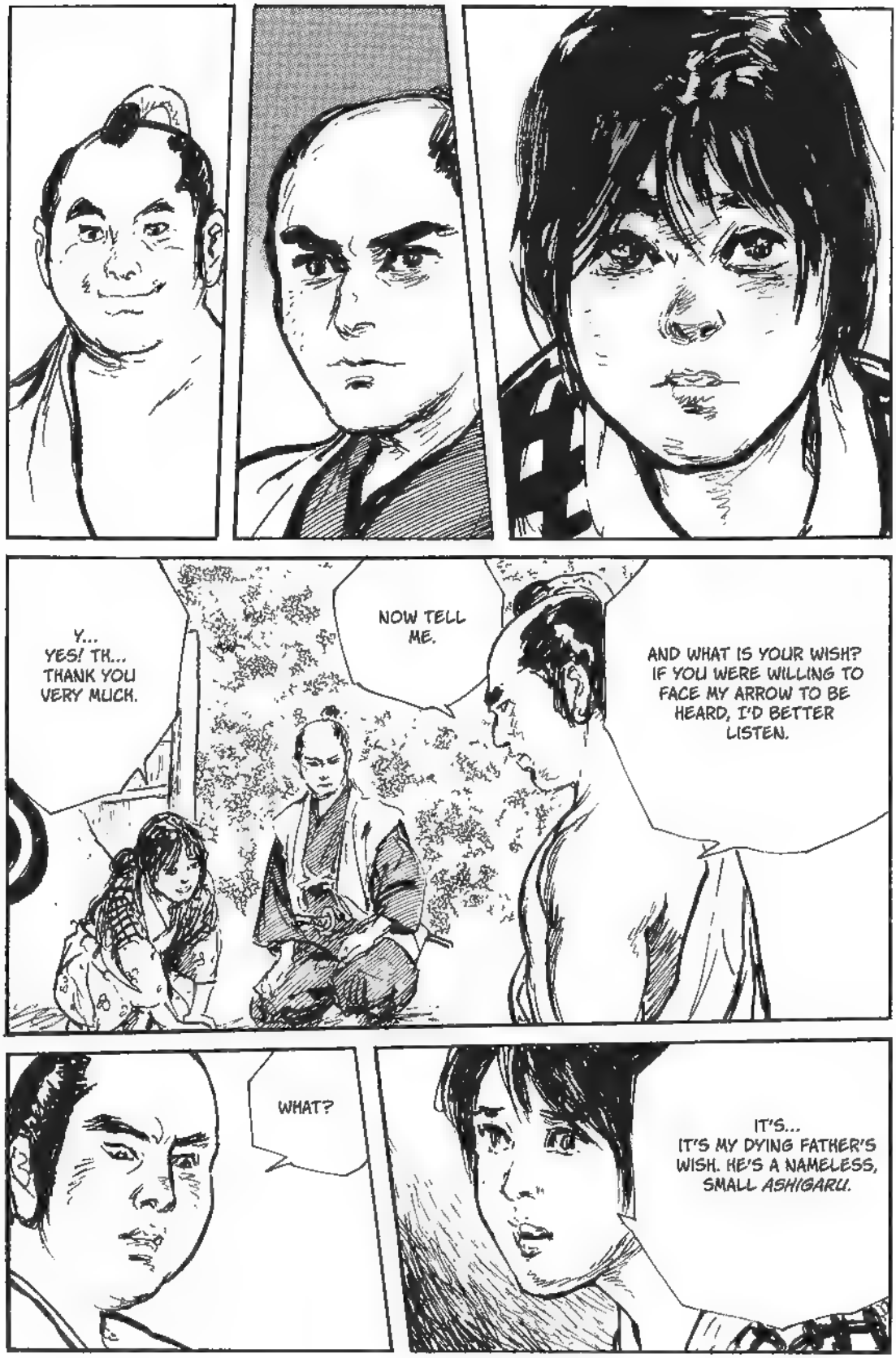

WSSH
TONK


GOOD!


BYU
SWARR

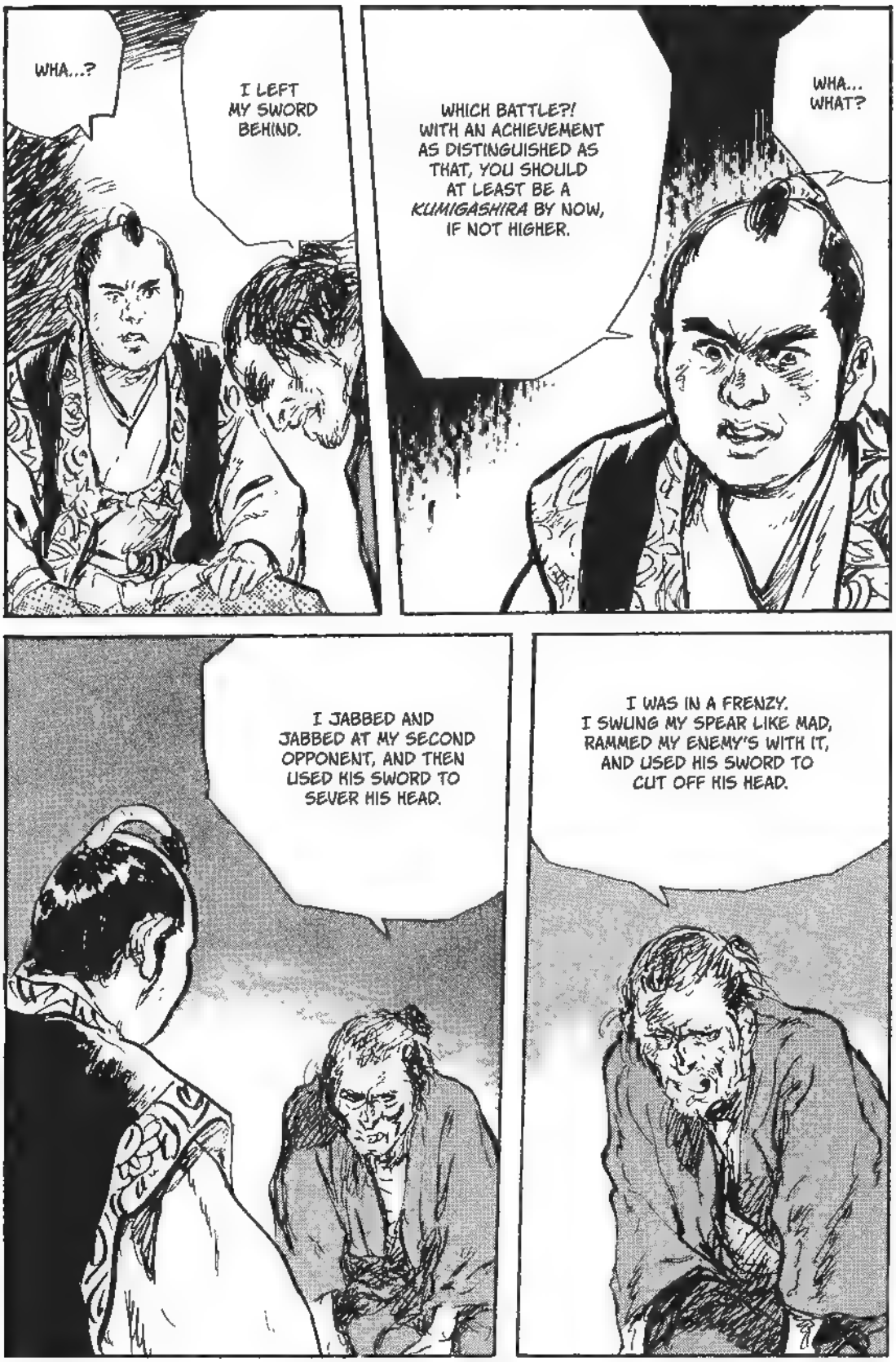
WHO ARE YOU?!
P... PLEASE... PARDON ME.
IF KANZŌ WASN'T HERE, WHO KNOWS WHAT WOULD'VE HAPPENED!
PHEWW! THAT WAS CLOSE!
IT'S FINE. LIFT YOUR FACE.
PLEAD UPON YOUR DEATH? WHAT AN ALARMING THING TO SAY FOR A WOMAN.
I... I MEANT TO HAVE YOUR ARROW HIT ME... AND PLEAD UPON MY DEATH...


Y...
YES! TH...
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
NOW TELL ME.
AND WHAT IS YOUR WISH? IF YOU WERE WILLING TO FACE MY ARROW TO BE HEARD, I'D BETTER LISTEN.
WHAT?
IT'S...
IT'S MY DYING FATHER'S WISH. HE'S A NAMELESS, SMALL ASHIGARU.

HOWEVER, IT WOULD BE TOO IMPUDENT FOR SOMEONE LIKE HIM TO ASK YOU TO COME, SO HE TOLD ME TO THROW MY LIFE AWAY...
HE HAD THE HONOR TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE YOU DURING THE *IKKŌ-IKKI* AND SUSTAINED A MORTAL WOUND. BEFORE HE DEPARTS THIS WORLD, HE WISHES TO HAVE A WORD WITH YOU, MILORD. BUT HE IS UNABLE TO MOVE, SO HE NEEDS YOU TO VISIT HIM...
THERE IS NO SMALL OR BIG AMONG MY VASSALS.
I WILL VISIT HIM!
...AND PLEAD THIS WAY.
TH... THANK YOU... VERY MUCH.
AND YOUR FATHER WAS HURT IN BATTLE. I MUST VISIT HIM.

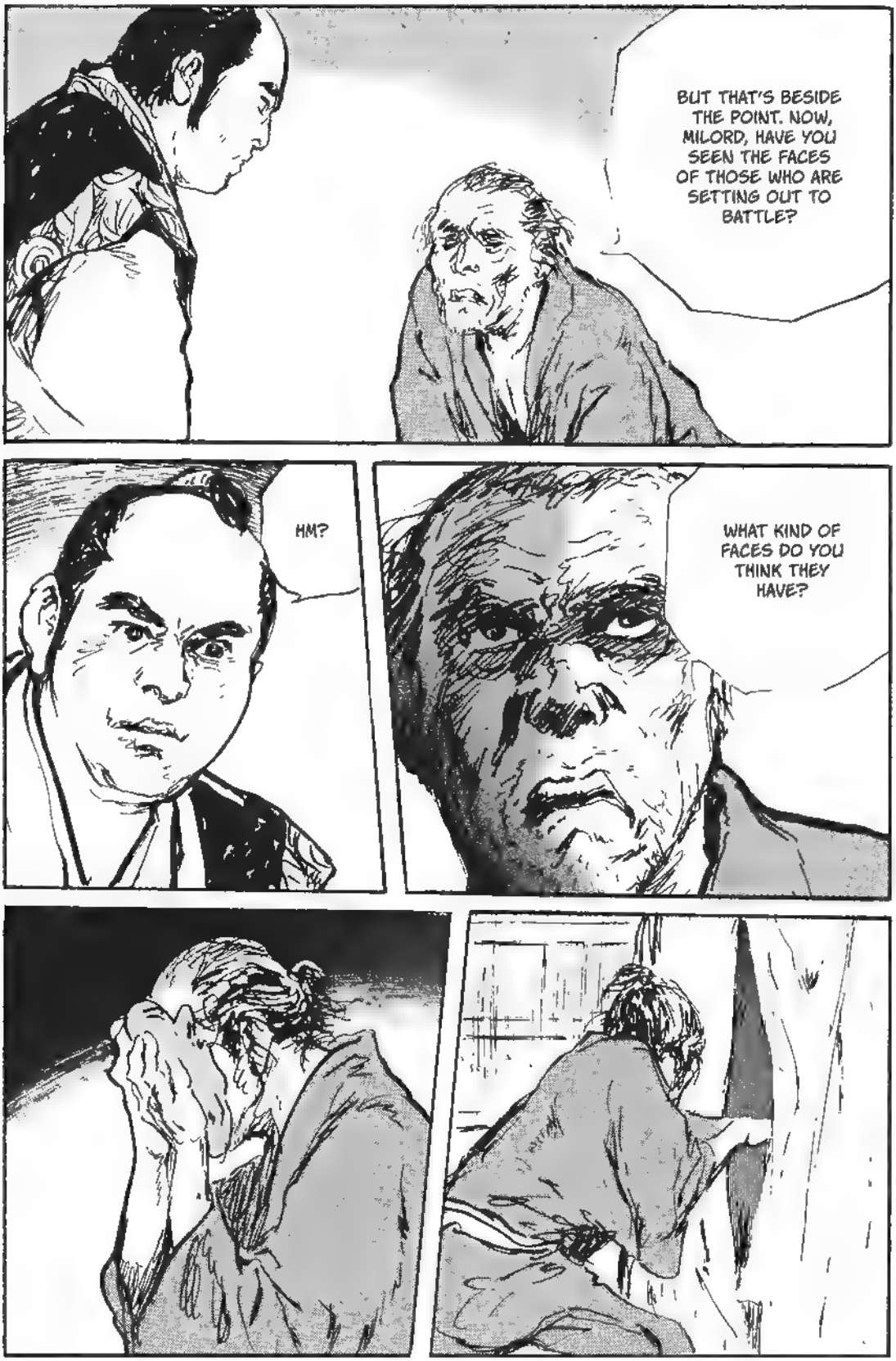
EVEN IF I TOLD YOU, YOU WOULD NOT KNOW. BESIDES, HE IS NOT ASKING TO BE HONORED FOR HIS SERVICE. HE SIMPLY WISHES TO BE TREATED AS A NAMELESS, SMALL ASHIGARU.
AND HIS NAME? STATE HIS NAME FIRST.
HM.
SO PLEASE.

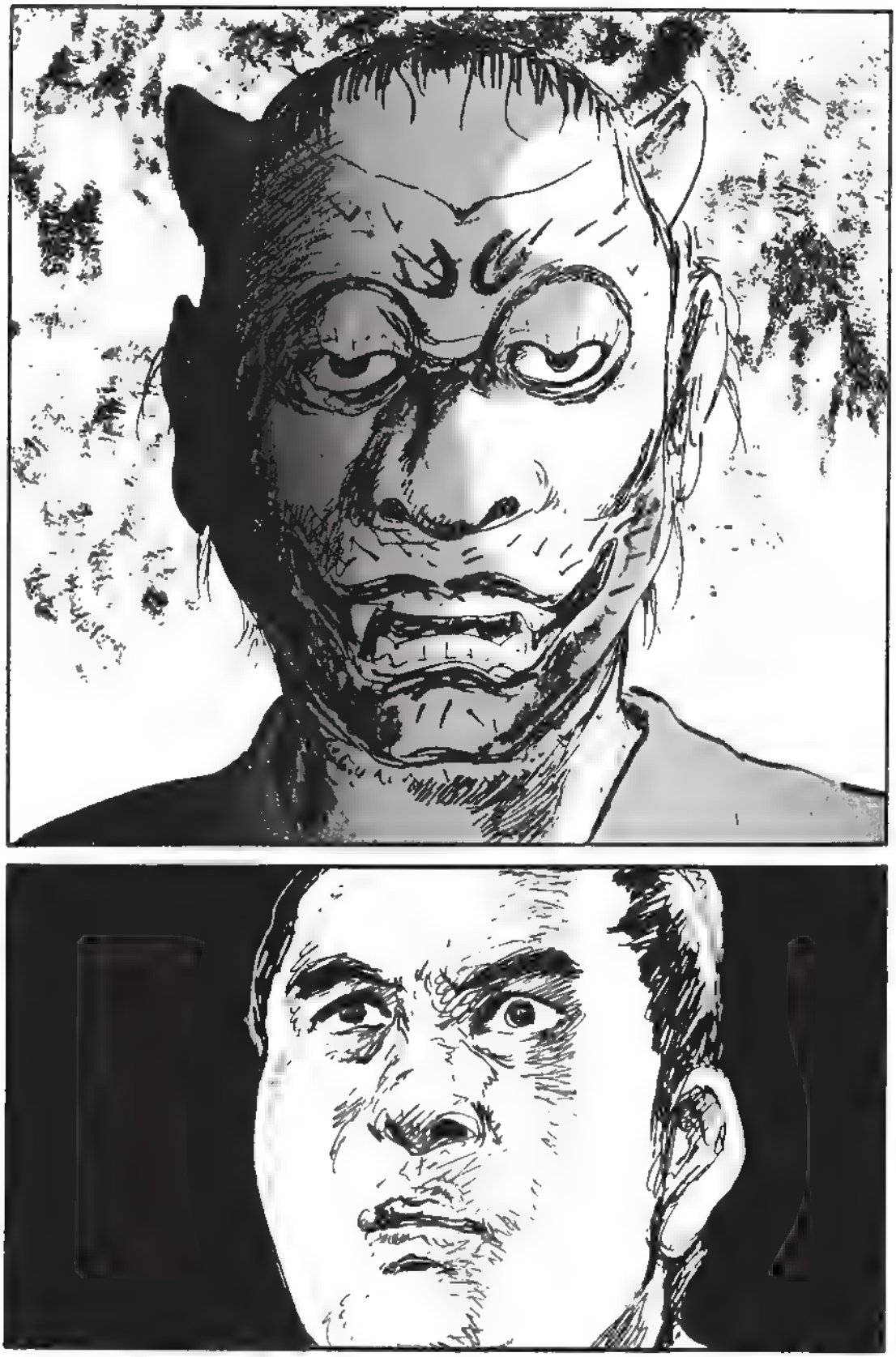
I APOLOGIZE FOR ASKING, MILORD, FOR YOU TO COME WHEN I'M JUST A VASSAL.
ALSO PLEASE PARDON MY RUDENESS FOR NOT REVEALING MY NAME.
STAY DOWN AND BE COMFORTABLE.
I... I THANK YOU.
D... DURING A BATTLE... LONG AGO... I WAVED MY SPEAR AND RAN THROUGH AN ENEMY CAMP... AND SEVERED THE HEAD OF A GENERAL AND TWO SAMURAI WARRIORS.
THAT'S FINE. DO AS YOU WISH, AND SAY WHATEVER YOU WANT ME TO HEAR.
YES!
I... I WILL... SIR.


WHA...?
I LEFT MY SWORD BEHIND.
WHICH BATTLE?! WITH AN ACHIEVEMENT AS DISTINGUISHED AS THAT, YOU SHOULD AT LEAST BE A *KUMIGASHIRA* BY NOW, IF NOT HIGHER.
WHA... WHAT?
I JABBED AND JABBED AT MY SECOND OPPONENT, AND THEN USED HIS SWORD TO SEVER HIS HEAD.
I WAS IN A FRENZY. I SWUNG MY SPEAR LIKE MAD, RAMMED MY ENEMY'S WITH IT, AND USED HIS SWORD TO CUT OFF HIS HEAD.

WHEN I RETURNED, MY SWORD WASN'T IN MY SHEATH, AND EVERYONE LAUGHED.
HOW COULD A MAN WHO'D LOSE HIS OWN SWORD WIN ANYONE'S HEAD? THEY JEERED AND SHOUTED THAT I'D PICKED UP SOME HEADS THAT WERE LYING ON THE GROUND.
SOME CURSED AND SAID I'D LEFT MY SOUL BEHIND.

THAT'S WHY MY ACHIEVEMENTS WERE NEVER RECORDED, AND I WAS NEVER PROMOTED.


BUT THAT'S BESIDE THE POINT. NOW, MILORD, HAVE YOU SEEN THE FACES OF THOSE WHO ARE SETTING OUT TO BATTLE?
HM?
WHAT KIND OF FACES DO YOU THINK THEY HAVE?



THIS IS THE MASK OF YAKAN WORN BY *NOCHI-SHITE* IN SESSHŌSEKI.

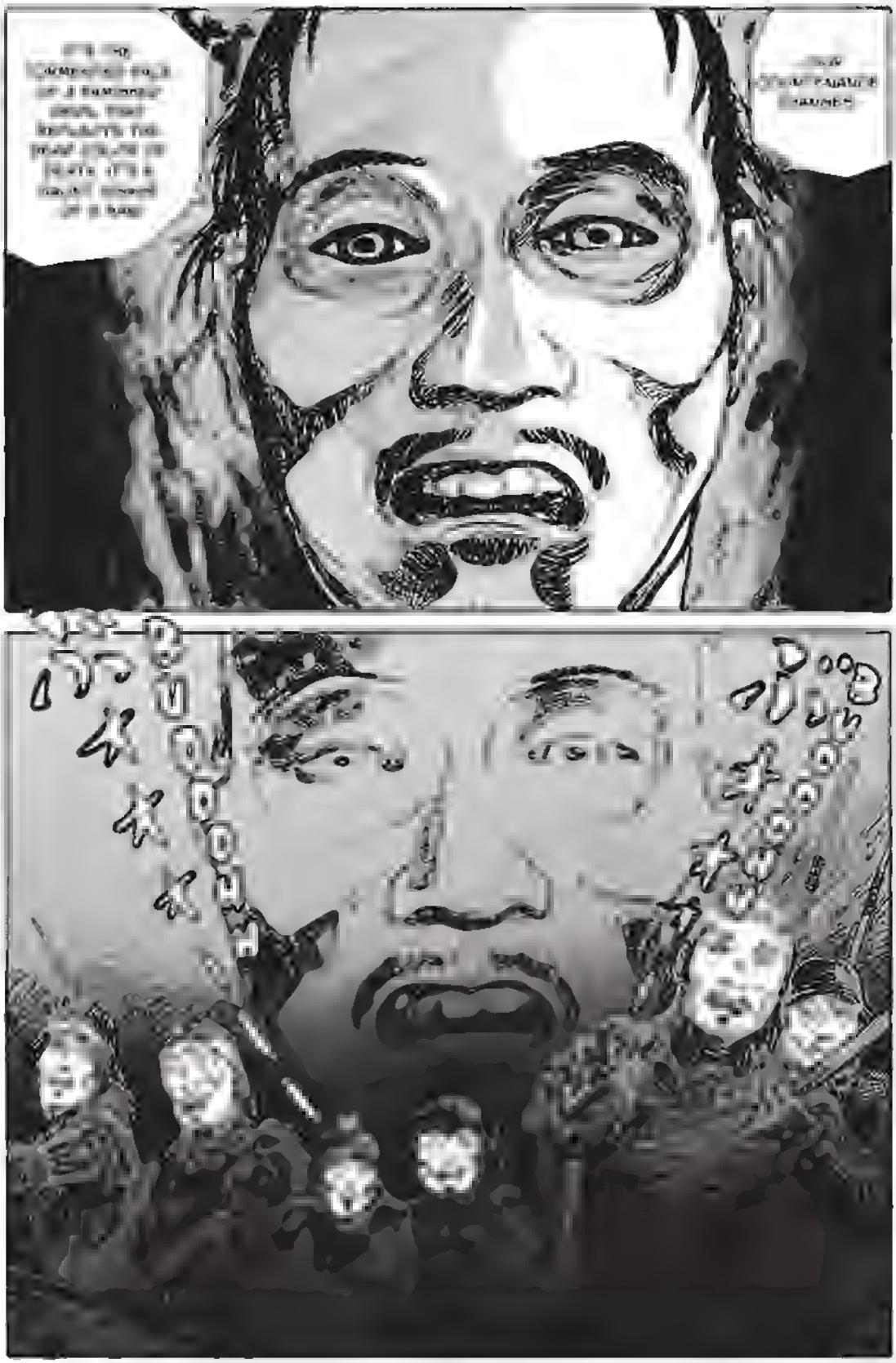
THE NIGHT BEFORE WE LEAVE FOR BATTLE, I THINK EVERY SOLDIER LOOKS LIKE THIS.

THE MORE VALIANT A SOUL, THE HARDER IT IS TO FALL ASLEEP, BECAUSE HE BECOMES TOO AWARE OF APPROACHING DEATH.
WE MAY DRINK *SAKE* AND SING BOISTEROUSLY, BUT WE CAN NEVER WIPE AWAY THE TERROR OF DEATH THAT CLINGS TO THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS.

AS DAWN NEARS, HOWEVER, OUR FOCUS CHANGES. OUR INSTINCT FOR SURVIVAL BEGINS TO DOMINATE OUR HEARTS, AND IF WE ARE TO RETURN ALIVE, WE MIGHT AS WELL COME BACK WITH A HEAD OR TWO. SUCH PRACTICAL DESIRES TAKE HOLD OF OUR WHOLE BEING.

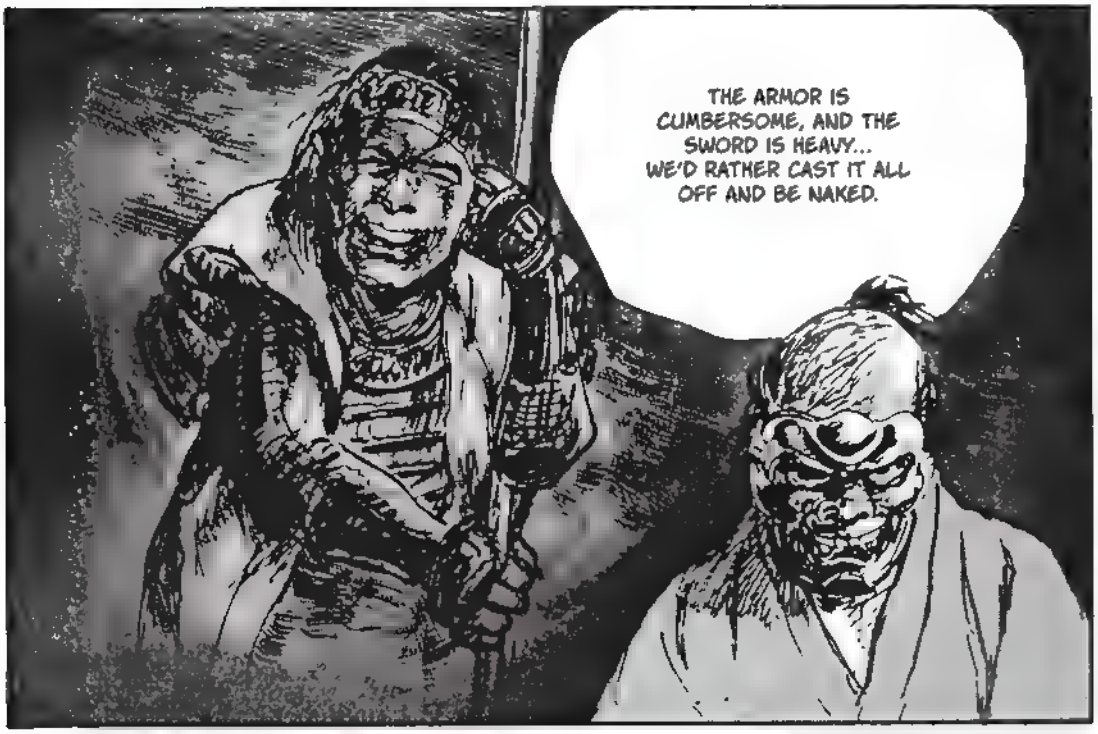
WHEN OUR FEAR OF DEATH AND OUR NEED FOR DISTINCTION JOIN TOGETHER, OUR FACES TURN INTO THAT OF *YAKAN*.

WHEW
AND THEN WHEN THE BATTLE HORN RESOUNDS, ANNOUNCING THAT WE'RE TO TAKE THE FIELD...
BUOOOH
WOW.
BUOOOH



AFTER THE WAR ENDS IN VICTORY... HOW DO WE, THE SURVIVING SOLDIERS, FEEL AT HEART ?
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO DESCRIBE IN WORDS

BUT IF I MUST MAKE IT COME OUT LOUD, I SAY WE FEEL LIKE THROWING EVERYTHING AWAY


THE ARMOR IS CUMBERSOME, AND THE SWORD IS HEAVY... WE'D RATHER CAST IT ALL OFF AND BE NAKED.

AND OUR COUNTE-NANCE CHANGES AGAIN!

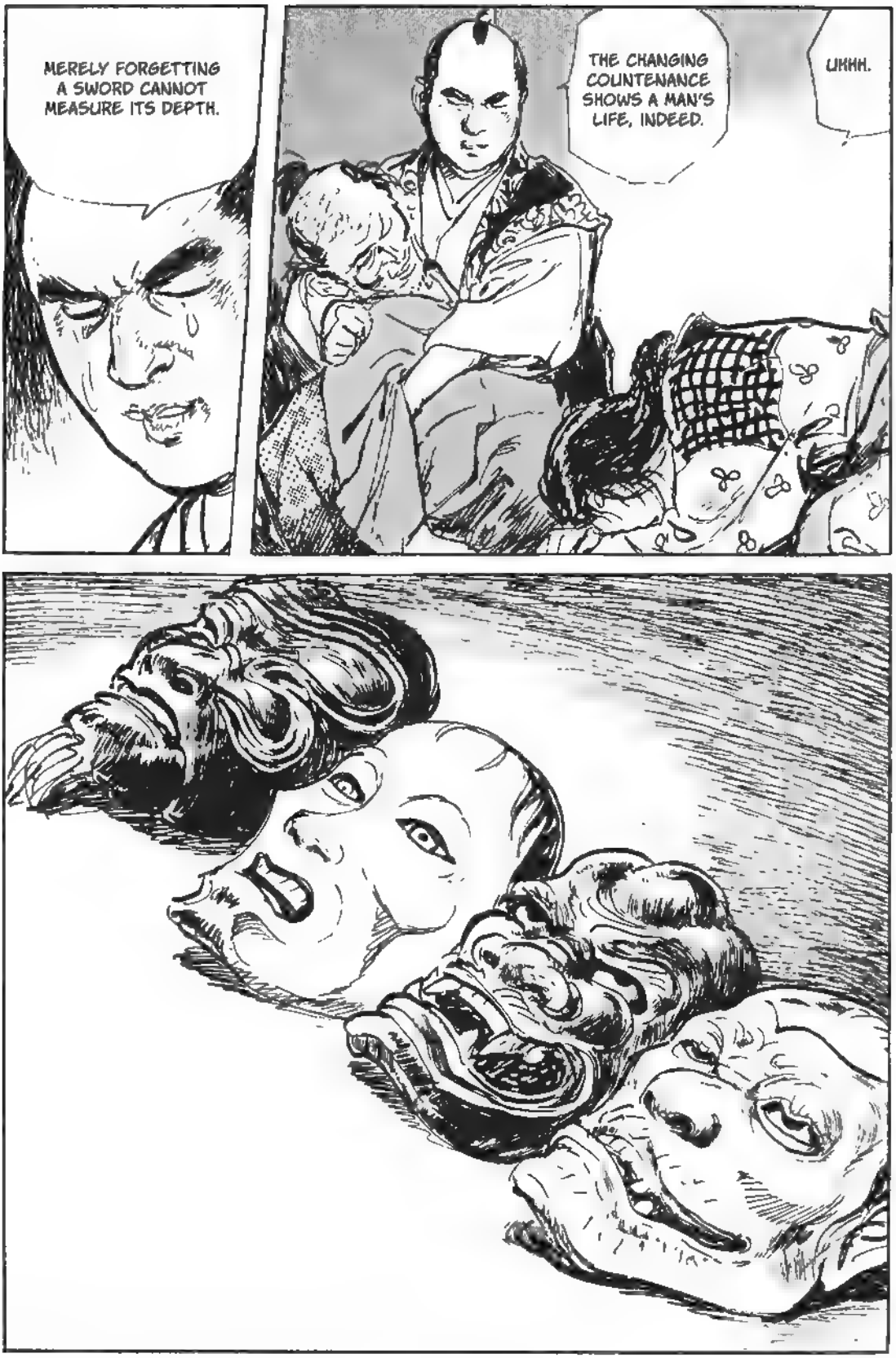
THE WHOLE BODY FEELS WEIGHTLESS, AND WE EVEN BREAK INTO LAUGHTER. AND WE WANT TO GET RID OF EVERYTHING AND BECOME EVEN LIGHTER.

...TO BE ALIVE. WE GET TO FULLY TASTE WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE. AND IF OUR HEART REFLECTS ON OUR FACE, IT WOULD BE...
INDEED, HOW WONDERFUL IT IS. .
KOKU-SHIKIJŌ...
TH... THIS IS MORE THAN I DESERVE.

THE TRUTH APPEARS ON THE FACE, AND I SHOULD PAY ATTENTION ESPECIALLY TO THE SOLDIERS IN THE LOWER RANKS.
I UNDERSTOOD YOU VERY WELL. I MUST NOT BE BLINDED BY FORMALITY, BUT SEE THE TRUTH OF MEN.
I... I AM GRATEFUL FOR THIS PLEASURE...

FROM TIME TO TIME... IF YOU'D TAKE A LOOK AT THESE MASKS... THAT I CARVED...
IT IS... TOO GOOD A BLESSING... THAT, AT LEAST, YOU KNOW... THAT IT WAS NOT UNNATURAL FOR ME... TO HAVE LEFT MY SWORD BEHIND...

FATHER!!
I HEARD WHAT YOU WANTED TO SAY. I HEARD YOU!
ALL OF YOU HAVE ENTRUSTED YOUR PRICELESS LIVES TO ME. AS YOUR MASTER, I MUST TREAT YOU EVEN MORE PRECIOUSLY.
WHAT'S MOST PRECIOUS FOR A MAN IS HIS LIFE. IT'S NOT HIS SWORD, NOR HIS SPEAR, NOR HIS ACHIEVEMENTS, NOR THE CODE OF *SAMURAI*.


MERELY FORGETTING A SWORD CANNOT MEASURE ITS DEPTH.
THE CHANGING COUNTENANCE SHOWS A MAN'S LIFE, INDEED.
UHHH.

GLOSSARY

Amida Nyorai
Amitābha the Tathāgata

Amitābha
A celestial Buddha described in the scriptures of Mahāyāna Buddhism. According to these scriptures, Amitābha is a Buddha possessing infinite merits resulting from good deeds over countless past lives as a *bodhisattva*.

ashigaru
Foot-soldiers of medieval Japan.

biwa
A *biwa* is a Japanese short-necked fretted lute, and a close variant of the Chinese *pipa*. The *biwa* is the chosen instrument of Benten, the white snake goddess of Japan's Shinto religion.

bonze
A Buddhist monk, especially of China, Japan, or nearby countries.

Echigo
Echigo was a province in north-central Japan ruled by Uesugi Kenshin and his heirs during the Sengoku period; later it became a fief of Ieyasu's Matsudaira relatives.

Goyu
A town in Aichi prefecture.

gunbai
A solid fan usually made of wood, used by samurai officers in Japan to communicate commands to their soldiers.

hōkashi
Traveling entertainers, street performers, and street peddlers.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*
chan – for children, young women, and close friends
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
sama – used for superiors
sensei – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

Igamono
"Men of Iga."

ikko-ikki
The Japanese *ikko ikki*, literally "single-minded leagues," were mobs of peasant farmers and low-status samurai, who rose up against samurai rule in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They followed the beliefs of the Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, which taught that all believers are equally saved by Amida Buddha's grace.

Ikkōshū
Another way of saying Jodo Shinshū.

Ishiyama Honganji
The Ishiyama Honganji was the primary fortress of the *ikko-ikki*, mobs of warrior monks and peasants who opposed samurai rule. It was established in 1496, at the mouth of the Yodo river, on the coast of the Seto inland sea. At the time, this was just outside of the city of Osaka, in Settsu province.

Kaga
An old province in the area that is today the southern part of Ishikawa prefecture. Ruled by the Maeda family, the capital of Kaga was Kanazawa. Kaga bordered on Echizen, Etchu, Hida, and Noto provinces.

kansho
Call bell(s) or summoning bell(s).

Kitaōmi
The northeast district of Shiga prefecture.

kokushikijō
The dark-faced mask of an old man that appears in the Noh play called Okina.

komusō
Mendicant Zen priests of the Fuke sect, characterized by their wearing of a sedge hood and playing of a *shakuhachi* flute.

kumigashira
A squad leader.

kunai
A *kunai* is an ancient kind of trowel, originated during the Tensho era in Japan. Contrary to popular belief, they were not designed as throwing weapons, though they can definitely be thrown and cause damage. *Ninjutsu* is very versatile in the way it employs weapons and non-weapons. A ninja could work as a gardener during the day and use a *kunai* without raising suspicion.

matamono
A vassal of a vassal. A rear vassal, an under-vassal.

Mikawa
Mikawa was the original fief of the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu before he gained control of Kanto. *Mi* (three) + *kawa* (river).

Minō province
Mino is an old province of Japan, which today composes nearly the southern part of Gifu prefecture.

Nichiren
A Japanese Buddhist monk and founder of a sect of Buddhism that bears his name. He believed that the true teachings of the Buddha were found only in the Lotus Sutra.

nochi-shite
The *shite* (main/primary actor) that appears in the latter half of a *Noh* play.

onriedo
The text of a sutra, meaning "Leave the depraved land. Pursue the peaceful world."

Sakai Masachika
A vassal who served two generations of Matsudaira before Ieyasu. During the time of Ieyasu, he served as a *karō*. He was also known to have accompanied Ieyasu when Ieyasu was taken to Sunpu as a hostage.

sarugakushi
Noh dance performers.

sesshō-seki
The *sessho-seki* or "killing stone," is an object in Japanese mythology. It is said that the stone kills anyone who comes into contact with it. The *sessho-seki* was said to be haunted by the transformed spirit of an evil fox, until a Buddhist priest called Genno stopped for a rest near the stone, and was threatened by the spirit. Genno performed certain spiritual rituals, and begged the spirit to consider her spiritual salvation, until finally the spirit relented and swore to never haunt the stone again. Also the title of a *Noh* play.

shinobi
Ninja.

Shinran Shōnin
A pupil of *honen* and the founder of the Jodo Shinshu (or True Pure Land) sect in Japan.

shishiguchi
Literally translates to "lion mouth." It is a mask used in *Noh*, and it represents the ferocious spirit of a lion.

shugo
The title given to certain officials in feudal Japan. They were each appointed by the shogun to oversee a province.

shukaisho
Assembly bell(s) or meeting bell(s).

shukke
Literally translates to "leaving home," but it actually means "renouncing family and secular life and responsibilities and entering the religious life."

tathāgata
Traditionally interpreted as "one who comes and goes in the same way (as the previous buddhas)." Tathāgata is the name which the historical Buddha Sakyamuni (Siddhattha Gotama) used when referring to himself as recorded in the Tripitaka of the Pali canon. It highlights the unique (and ambiguous) ontological status of a fully enlightened being since such a one is beyond the categories of existence and non-existence; in fact beyond all signification.

Tōkai
Tōkai is a subregion of Chubu, Japan along the Pacific Ocean.

Tokugawa
Toku (virtue/merit/grace/good) + *gawa* (*kawa* =river).

Yakan
The evil fox that appears in the *Noh* play called *Sesshōseki*.

yamabushi
Japanese mountain ascetics and warriors, mostly of the Shingon sect of Buddhism. For the most part solitary, they did form loose confederations, and associations with certain temples, and also participated in battles and skirmishes alongside samurai and *sohei* on occasion.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

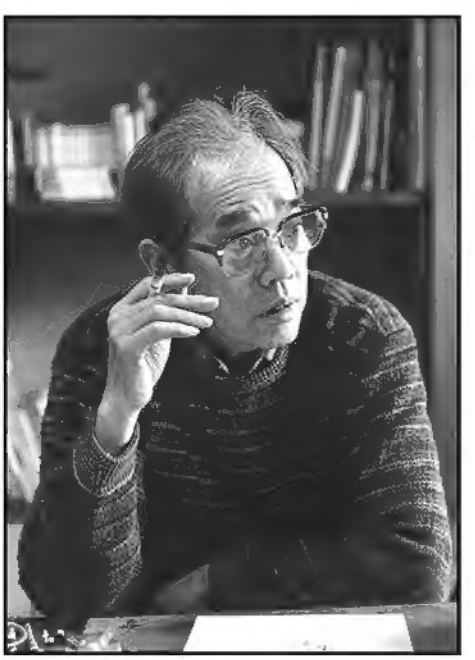
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including *Path of the Assassin* and *Samurai Executioner.*

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman,* Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku,* a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

translation
NAOMI KOKUBO
with assistance by **JEFF CARLSON**

lettering and retouch
SNO CONE STUDIOS

publisher
MIKE RICHARDSON

editor
TIM ERVIN

book design
DARIN FABRICK

art director
LIA RIBACCHI

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